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## Student-Athlete Learning: How Learning Spaces Influence Athletic and Academic Success

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Student-Athlete Learning: How Learning Spaces  
Influence Athletic and Academic Success

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Kelli A. Logan

August 2015

Advisor: Ryan Gildersleeve

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Author: Kelli A. Logan

Title: Student-Athlete Learning: How Learning Spaces Influence Athletic and Academic Success

Advisor: Ryan Gildersleeve

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### **Abstract**

This study will utilize case study inquiry to examine student-athlete learning opportunities in the athletic learning space and academic learning space in a higher education NCAA Division I collegiate institution. This study will assess what learning opportunities exist within the athletic and academic learning space to better understand effective learning practices. This study will utilize the sociocultural Learning Sciences literature, supported with critical pedagogy and inclusive excellence literature, to understand how different learning spaces contribute to student-athlete learning opportunities and educational success in college.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Ronald Flowers (2009) stated:

America is unique in that participation in sport has historically been linked to colleges and universities under the premise that participation serves an educational function and supplements the mission of the higher education. Yet, intercollegiate athletics is seldom discussed in institutional accreditation self-studies, mission statements, or annual reports as part of higher education's primary purpose of teaching, research, and service. The irony of this silence is that when faced with criticism, athletic programs continue to be rationalized as proxies to higher education's academic mission. (p. 343)

### **College Athletics Current Events**

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) faces constant ridicule and pending lawsuits that threaten reform to how college sports operate (Vint, 2014a). Taylor Branch, a well-regarded historian of college sports, stated (Lederman, 2012, para 17):

The time has come for a major overhaul. And whether the powers that be like it or not, big changes are coming. Threats loom on multiple fronts: in Congress, the courts, breakaway athletic conferences, student rebellion, and public disgust. Swaddled in gauzy cliches, the NCAA presides over a vast, teetering glory.

Several current issues challenge how the NCAA and college conferences operate, including: player pay, scholarship amounts, player health, and amateurism (Vint, 2014a). Gary R. Roberts, dean of the law school at Indiana University, and a faculty athletics representative for the NCAA for many years indicated (Lederman, 2012, para. 6):

We're in one of those periodic cycles where a bunch of things have aligned to put the industry into crisis mode, and they will do some things that make it appear like they're going to clean up their act...But they'll try to get out of it with as

little disruption as possible. The truth is that you're not going to fundamentally change the nature of the enterprise in our lifetimes.

Though typically the NCAA is not quick to enact change, in 2011 the NCAA made the following changes (Lederman, 2012, para. 21):

- New rules that toughened the academic standards that freshman and transfer athletes must meet to be eligible to compete and raised the Academic Progress Rate that teams must reach to stay in good standing with the NCAA.
- Gave athletic conferences the flexibility to give athletes multiyear athletic scholarships (as opposed to single year grants) and to award athletically related financial aid equal to the full cost of attendance at their institutions (though those rules have since been challenged by significantly numbers of less-wealthy NCAA members).
- Prune the NCAA's rulebook to eliminate "nuisance rules" and revamp the NCAA's penalty structure in ways that both enforce the rules more consistently and punish major rule breakers harshly.

NCAA President, Mark Emmert, stated that these changes (Lederman, 2012, para. 22):

Show that the association under his leadership is both serious about and capable of making major changes that can respond to the sorts of concerns raised by Branch and other critics, by treating athletes more fairly and punishing rule breakers more harshly.

Though the 2011 changes were well received, many critics, students, and college conferences continue to push for reform. The most high-profile issue right now that could affect student-athletes in higher education is the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) ruling that granted Northwestern football players the ability to form the first college



sports labor union (Levinson, 2014; Vint, 2014b). The NLRB only governs private-sector employees; therefore, the ruling only affects those athletes at private sector schools (Levinson, 2014). After the decision to unionize was granted, Ramogi Huma, co-founder and president of the Northwestern players' group stated, "Today, college athletes are employees. It's a first step toward forever changing the balance of power and guaranteeing players have a seat at the table and the right to bargain for basic protections" (Levinson, 2014, para.5).

Many schools, along with the NCAA, are in disagreement with the NLRB decision and firmly oppose the idea that student-athletes are employees (Levinson, 2012). Lisa Powers, a spokeswoman for Penn State University responded to the decision in an email that Penn State strongly believes that student-athletes are students, not employees, of the university (Levinson, 2014). The Vice President for University relations at Northwestern, Alan Cabbage, was disappointed in the decision and stated, "Northwestern believes strongly that our student-athletes are not employees, but students. Unionization and collective bargaining are not the appropriate methods to address the concerns raised by student-athletes" (Levinson, 2014, para. 13).

The NCAA declared that student-athletes viewed as employees would face many "destructive consequences" including (Levinson, 2014, para. 22).

- Marginalize the importance of educational programs
- Isolate rather than integrate student-athletes as a fundamental part of the student body

- Undercut the demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports
- Undermine the revered tradition of amateurism that colleges and universities have worked tirelessly to preserve for the benefit of students in America
- Fundamentally alter the developmental and educational opportunities provided by college athletics
- Usurp the responsibilities entrusted to our academic leaders to determine what priority and role athletics should play in the educational development of the college students placed in their care

If the consequences declared by the NCAA are in fact true threats, student-athletes could suffer academically. The NCAA has worked feverishly over the past century to establish guidelines, rules, and policies protecting student-athletes and mandating some type of balance in academics and athletics. Student-athletes' primary responsibility in college is to be a successful student first, athlete second. One complaint Peter Sung Ohr, the NLRB representative that ruled in favor of a player union, had was the perception that Northwestern University placed priority on football over academics citing, "Players are not permitted to take classes that conflict with practice, and scholarship players cannot leave practice early to make a class" (Vint, 2014b).

I was a scholarship student-athlete at Northwestern University from 1999 to 2003. I did feel an allegiance to my sport and at times feared my athletic career would suffer if I chose academics over athletics for any reason. I was a successful student and athlete, but saw many fellow athletes struggle to be successful academically for reasons outlined in

the literature review. The proposed project in this paper is concerned with how higher education communities can better understand what enhances student-athlete learning opportunities in the athletic and academic learning space at NCAA Division I universities. With the current issue of player unionization in the forefront of discussion, now is a perfect time to conduct research around what aids in producing successful student-athletes by examining/exploring existing learning opportunities in the athletic and academic learning space.

### **Introduction of Topic**

Though intercollegiate sports were established in colleges in colonial America, it was in 1906 that the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (later to become the NCAA) formed and began developing rules and regulations for intercollegiate athletics (NCAA, 2003; Flowers, 2009). The NCAA indicated its purpose was to integrate and maintain intercollegiate athletics and academics as part of one institutional student body (NCAA, 2003). Sport activities in colonial America were student-run activities, “co-opted by the leadership of higher education for marketing purposes to increase enrollment, philanthropy, and public support” (Flowers, 2009, p. 344). In 1950, the term “student-athlete” was first introduced in the United States by the NCAA in an effort to silence negative publicity created by the introduction of athletic scholarships in collegiate institutions, and to convince institutional leaders and the general public that scholarship athletes are just like any other student on campus (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). Since the mid to late 1900s, the term has become common terminology used to describe any person attending an educational institution that has

student status and also participates in an organized, college/university affiliated sport (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005).

As athletics have become a dominant fixture on collegiate campuses, the NCAA has voiced concerns about the suffering educational and student experience of student-athletes on college grounds (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Those unfamiliar with the purpose and role of college athletics think that big college sports programs are a commercialized enterprise (Flowers, 2009) and simply incompatible with the goals of education (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). How can educational institutions (faculty, staff, and administration) and athletic departments (coaches, academic advisors, and athletic directors) encourage the development of student-athletes that places priority on academic achievement rather than athletic prowess (Curtis, 2006)? Murray Sperber, a professor of English and American Studies at Indiana University, examined college athletics within higher education and asserts that many athletic programs at universities create a system that focuses primarily on utilizing student-athletes as entertainers, producing winning and profitable sports teams (Sperber, 1990). Sperber concludes that intercollegiate sports are incongruent with the educational purpose/aim of higher education institutions. According to others, it is “imperative that the mission, purpose, and goals of athletic programs be congruent with those of the college or university” (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 41) in order to properly integrate student-athletes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

All students require unique academic support in achieving personal goals, and student-athletes are no exception. Student-athletes are successful athletically because they

work hard, are self-disciplined, focused, determined, exhibit perseverance, and have the mental ability to concentrate on the athletic task at hand (Simons et al., 1999). Simons et al. state that if these qualities were transmitted into the academic setting, student-athletes would likely experience more academic success. In a study (discussed in detail later in this paper) conducted by Gaston-Gayles (2004), finding ways to “transfer skills from the athletic domain to the academic domain can make a significant difference in how student athletes approach academics” (p. 82). Many faculty members and academic advisors become discouraged and confused when witnessing student-athletes settle for mediocrity in academics, while showing exceptional motivation and focus in working towards being a stellar athlete (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Is it truly fair to assume student-athletes are consciously settling for mediocrity in the classroom or is there more to it? Recent research indicates that altering how student-athletes perceive and approach educational tasks might be key in reshaping their motivation to be successful in academia (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

Current research places an emphasis on student-athlete success in the classroom through a deficit lens, focusing more on their inadequacies than on what they are doing well. Studies discussing why student-athletes are less successful in academia for reasons surrounding mental, physical, and emotional insufficiencies is prominent in literature. Limited research examines the notion that student-athletes have positive attributes and relationships that affect successful learning. In order to better understand what influences student-athlete learning success, this study will utilize an exploratory qualitative approach to better assess, from a positive perspective/lens, what is happening in the

athletic and academic learn space that encourages successful student-athlete learning in higher education.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the athletic learning space?
2. What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the academic learning space?

These research questions will guide the understanding of how learning takes place in the athletic and academic learning space. Existing research/literature does not label the athletic environment as a learning space or directly speak to what learning opportunities exist in the athletic learning space. This research project defines the athletic space as one where learning occurs and begins discussion surrounding student-athlete learning opportunities within both the athletic and academic learning spaces. Understanding what learning opportunities exist and are successful in both the athletic and academic learning spaces is limited in current research, but this project/paper sets out to encourage further research on this relevant and important topic.

Developing a better understanding of what learning opportunities exist in the athletic and academic learning space and how those learning opportunities influence successful learning in higher education, will provide insight for supporting student-athlete successful learning in higher education institutions. In answering these research

questions, there will be a heightened awareness as to how student-athletes learn in the athletic and academic learning space.

### **Significance/Purpose of the Study**

Student-athletes have a unique position on college campuses, as they attain a dual identity of student and athlete. Student-athlete academic success is a topic that has been examined/studied for years, but understanding why student-athletes are prone to more success in their athletic domain than in their academic classroom is still debatable. Therefore, I propose a study that examines the learning opportunities in both the athletic and academic learning spaces to better understand what impacts a student-athlete's ability to learn effectively. Current research looking at the aforementioned factors is limited. Therefore, my study findings will begin to fill a gap in existing research and bring attention to student-athlete learning from a new, more positive perspective.

The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of what learning opportunities exist in the athletic and academic learning space and how these opportunities influence a successful, positive learning environment for student-athletes in higher education institutions. Understanding what positively influences student-athlete learning can inform the academic and athletic community at large on how to create a space conducive to learning opportunities and enable an environment that encourages effective learning practices.

## **Overview of Paper**

Literature reveals that student-athletes face unique challenges as they navigate how to effectively be a student and athlete in higher education institutions. The literature reviewed supporting this project identifies athletics and student-athletes as an important subpopulation in higher education institutions. The literature presented in this paper discusses the holistic experiences (schedule, perception, resources) of student-athletes attending NCAA Division I schools, recognizing the dual role a student-athlete has on campus. Identifying the holistic experience of student-athletes lends to an understanding of how learning might take place differently in various learning spaces. Understanding what learning opportunities exist in the athletic and academic learning environment is critical in determining how learning spaces on campus affect student-athlete learning opportunities.

To frame my exploration of the student-athlete experience, specifically identifying learning opportunities/successes within the athletic and academic learning space, I utilize the Learning Sciences literature to provide a sociocultural perspective of learning, as well as literature discussing inclusive excellence and critical pedagogy within the classroom, to ground my work and provide a lens/perspective of understanding student-athlete learning opportunities.

I utilize qualitative single-case study inquiry to gain insight and understanding into the lives of student-athletes in their athletic and academic learning spaces. This single-case study draws participants from the men's basketball team at the University of Denver. This case will be referred to as the DU Men's Basketball Team throughout this



paper/study. The DU Men's Basketball Team is diverse, high profile, and revenue-generating. I purposefully selected a population and sport at DU that the athletic department, academic services community, and donors care about and pay attention to. Since I am a student at DU, I have access to the DU Men's Basketball Team. I am located in Denver, close to the DU campus, which provides easier access for data collection than selecting a population outside of Denver.

I conducted interviews, focus groups, observations, and collected artifacts to support my research study and to uncover the experiences/perspectives that affect student-athlete learning opportunities in various learning spaces. I used codes and analyzed the different forms of data I collected, thinking about each participant's perspective/experience, revealing their personal account as accurately as possible. My research/data findings will serve to provide higher education communities with findings that can inform what learning opportunities/relationships exist in student-athlete learning spaces (athletic/academic), and how these opportunities encourage successful learning.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Many factors influence and contribute to student-athlete success in college. Since student-athletes that experience success in their athletic domain do not typically become a professional athlete once their college career ends (Harker, P.T., 2014), it is imperative to understand the factors that create successful student-athletes athletically and academically. The quality of education that student-athletes receive remains in question. What motivates and encourages athletes to be great at their given sport? Is the relationship a coach has and an instructor has with a student-athlete different? Is there a difference in the learning space created in the athletic world and in the academic classroom? The quality of education student-athletes receive in collegiate institutions can be difficult to define. Existing research looks at GPA and graduation rates to determine success of student-athletes academically. This is somewhat misleading. Is the only determinant of success in academics GPA and graduation rates? I would argue that many other factors influence student-athlete success. I propose that research should examine student-athlete relationships and learning spaces in order to provide new insight into why student-athletes are proactively successful in their athletic career, yet less interested/motivated to be successful in the academic environment, as they make their way towards graduation.

## **GPA and Graduation Rates**

The NCAA is adamant that educational attainment is a priority in academic institutions and the academic success and academic interest of students and student-athletes is indistinguishable (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Dr. Brandon E. Martin, the Director of Intercollegiate Athletics at California State University-Northridge, discusses the concept of “winning” as more than trophies and championship rings (Martin, 2009). Martin argues, “Real champions graduate from college having accrued all the benefits, gains, and outcomes associated with engagement in educationally purposeful activities, inside and outside the classroom beyond athletics” (Martin, 2009, p. 283). Martin, in his role, believes that a true indicator of a successful, winning season is when a student-athlete actively engages in rich educational experiences at the institution, outside of athletics.

The NCAA asserts that winning in the classroom is just as important as winning on the field (<http://www.ncaa.org/about/what-we-do/academics>). The NCAA states, “It’s our commitment – and our responsibility – to give young people opportunities to learn, play and succeed” (para 1). New academic rules have been set for college-bound student-athletes entering a Division I college or university after August 1, 2016. The new requirements are depicted in the chart below (<http://www.ncaa.org/initial-eligibility>).

**Figure 1**

Full Qualifier	Academic Redshirt	Nonqualifier
Complete 16 Core Courses: • 10 of the 16 core courses must be complete before 7th semester (senior year) of high school. • 7 of the 10 core courses must be in English, Math, or Science.	Complete 16 core courses.	Does not meet requirements for Full Qualifier or Academic Redshirt Status
Minimum Core-Course GPA of 2.3	Minimum Core-Course GPA of 2.0	
Meet the Competition sliding scale requirement of GPA and ACT/SAT score.*	Meet the Academic Redshirt sliding scale requirement of GPA and ACT/SAT score.*	
Graduate from high school	Graduate from high school	

Each year the NCAA produces an Academic Progress Rate (APR), which is used by the NCAA to hold Division I institutions accountable for student-athlete academic progress. The APR is a “team-based metric that accounts for the eligibility and retention of each student-athlete each term”

(<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/academic-progress-rate-apr>). The NCAA also releases the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) of Division I institutions each year, which is based on a six-year cohort

(<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/graduation-success-rate>). The NCAA indicates that both rates show student-athletes graduating at higher rates than their student peers within the general student body

(<http://www.ncaa.org/about/resources/research/graduation-success-rate>).

When looking at GPA and graduation rates, it appears that student-athletes are as successful as, or more successful, academically than their non-student-athlete peers. Literature throughout this paper paints a different picture. Uncovering how student-athlete academic success is defined in literature by GPA and graduation rates primarily is limiting, and does not tell a complete story of what truly defines student-athlete academic success. Many student-athletes are highly motivated individuals, have developed great time-management skills, are disciplined, have high self-esteem, and are extremely independent (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 2002). However, student-athletes are also isolated physically and socially from their non-athlete student peers and have little to no time to explore other aspects of their identity or engage in other co-curricular and academic activities (Ferrante, Etzel, & Lantz, 2002).

The dueling dynamic described above helps to explain why many student-athletes exude a “motivational contradiction” (Simons, Rheenen, & Covington, 1999, p. 151). Student-athletes are extremely motivated to be successful in their given sport and have been chosen to participate in their athletic domain based on their ability and desire to be successful. However, the same motivation and desire for success is not always visible in the classroom (Simons et al., 1999). Student-athletes are being asked to manage their lives and be successful at tasks that represent two very different realms of their student-athlete experience, athletics and academics (Woodruff & Schallert, 2008). It is suggested that student-athletes might be trying to “negotiate a system that was not designed for them” (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991, p. 189) making it difficult for them to successfully navigate the academic and athletic structural organization within higher education.

Marica Baxter Magolda (as cited in Quaya and Harper, 2007) states, “Students perceive education as ‘not made for them’ when it does not acknowledge, respect, and connect to their experience and perspectives. Hostile learning environments created by marginalization of particular students interfere with learning” (234).

### **Student-Athlete Role**

The notion that a student-athlete’s primary role is to be a student in college institutions and secondary role is to be an athlete has created controversial debate in the collegiate academic/athletic setting because little is known about how much time athletes spend “being a student” when not participating in sport required activities (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005; “Students First, Athletes Second”, 2010). Joy Gaston Gayles, a professor at North Carolina State University, and Shouping Hu, a professor at Florida State University, looked at the role/influence that sport participation and student engagement has on college outcomes among Division I student-athletes. They argue that a balance “between intercollegiate athletics and the goals for higher education so that student athletes experience positive gains in student learning and personal development has been an enigma” (Gayles & Hu, 2009, p. 315).

For years, controversy regarding a student-athlete’s academic qualification and ability to perform academically has existed (Emma, 2008). Even with this knowledge, assuring athlete academic accountability and ensuring the “growth and development of student athletes as more than athletes” (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 35) has been challenging on college campuses in the United States. Understanding why student-

athletes are successful in athletics and at times struggle to fully engage in academics deserves notable attention.

Ronald Flowers, a professor in the Department of Leadership and Counseling at Eastern Michigan University, studied the historical and fundamental roots of intercollegiate athletics in education and suggests that “In spite of the fact that athletic programs have come to be protected and promoted activities on college campuses across the country, there has been a reluctance to study the role of athletics in higher education” (Flowers, 2009, p. 343). In his study of intercollegiate athletics (2009), Flowers’ purpose was to look at the myths of intercollegiate athletics and “revisit the educational premise that has historically defined the fundamental nature [of college athletics]” (p. 343). Flowers (2009) suggests that although athletic programs are frequently rationalized as “proxies to higher education’s academic mission” (p. 343), intercollegiate athletic programs are seldom discussed in “institutional accreditation self-studies, mission statements, or annual reports” (p. 343), as serving the purpose of teaching in higher education.

Intercollegiate athletics is a multi-billion dollar industry that is both beneficial to students, student-athletes, institutions, and society, as well as, infested with a host of issues, including “the exploitation of student athletes, concerns about student athletes’ academic success and low graduation rates, cheating by student athletes and staff, and misbehavior and crimes committed by student athletes, coaches, and athletics staff” (Harmon, 2010, p. 26). Noel Harmon, a doctoral graduate of the University of Iowa, teaching courses in multiculturalism, indicates that the issues cited above are prime

contributors in explaining why some members of the university community, faculty, staff, and student peers maintain a low perception of student-athletes and athletic departments generally. Though athletics and student-athletes can bring a myriad of problems to an institution, they are an important subpopulation of the university community and understanding their role is in desperate need of attention (Harmon, 2010).

Joy L. Gaston-Gayles (2004) states that few research studies have “explored academic and athletic motivation as noncognitive variables and their usefulness in predicting academic performance for student athletes” (p. 76), so she conducted a study that examined the influence of athletic and academic motivation on successful academic performance. The participants attended a Division I Midwest university and represented eight varsity sports teams. Data was collected from 236 students, 33% female and 67% male. About 70% of the student-athlete participants were white and 30% were categorized as minority. A 6-point Likert-type scale survey titled Student Athletes’ Motivation Toward Sports and Academics Questionnaire (SAMSAQ) was developed and administered by Gaston-Gayles to assess academic and athletic motivation. Gaston-Gayles found that academic motivation, despite athletic motivation, was significant in defining future academic success of students. Gaston-Gayles suggests that with this finding, athletic and academic departments can positively affect student-athlete growth by “focus[ing] on building confidence in, spending more time on, and placing more effort on academic related tasks, as well as how to take responsibility for academic failures” (p. 82). Gaston-Gayles suggests that colleges and institutions can develop confidence in student-athletes in the classroom similar to the confidence they exhibit in the athletic



domain. Finding ways to “transfer skills from the athletic domain to the academic domain can make a significant difference in how student athletes approach academics” (Gaston-Gayles, 2004, p. 82).

As my review of literature begins to expose what is currently known about student-athletes and learning in higher education, many researchers take a compartmentalized (looking at issues/topics in silo) approach when explaining why and how the student-athlete experience influences academic learning. Literature discusses the various challenges, successes, conflicts, support, schedule, etc., of a student-athlete, but not cohesively. This literature review will identify the holistic experiences and challenges of student-athletes in higher education and begin to examine how relationships and learning spaces affect student-athlete learning success.

### **Why student-athletes and athletics are important in higher education**

Before discussing the student-athlete experience, learning, and available/needed resources in higher education, it is critical to first understand the role of student-athletes and athletic departments within higher education institutions. Myles Brand, President of the NCAA from 2003 to 2009 indicated, “The problem with college athletics is the growing separation of athletic departments, in fact and in attitude, from the rest of campus. We’ve got to bring athletics back into a single college experience” (Pennington, 2004, p. 3). If research indicates that Division I student-athletes are showing signs of lesser academic ability than non-athletes in similar collegiate programs (Eitzen, 2009), understanding the reasons student-athletes struggle to academically succeed will enable educators and coaches to fully engage in the holistic experience of the student-athlete.

Noel Harmon (2010) indicates, “As educators, we play an important role in shaping both the academic and cocurricular lives of student athletes, as well as guiding them toward fulfilling career goals” (p. 27). Being thoughtful about why student-athletes and athletic departments are important in higher education institutions will ground my understanding regarding the importance of their presence and continued success both in the academic and athletic realms.

### ***Enhance Academic Mission***

Intercollegiate athletics and student-athletes have been recognized in higher education institutions for over half a century (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). Universities that once viewed intercollegiate athletics as a distraction on college campuses, as early as the 1920s, began to recognize athletics as an integral and important part of higher education institutions (Davis, 1991). Peter Likins (2005) was a successful, competitive wrestler in college. He was a charter member of the NCAA Presidents Commission, chaired the NCAA Task Force on the Future of Intercollegiate Athletics, and served on the NCAA Executive Committee. He was the president of the University of Arizona from 1997 until he retired in 2006. He commented on the future of Division I athletics by stating, “When structured and operated as an integral part of the college or university, intercollegiate athletics can enhance the educational development of students and student-athletes and act as a window into the academy itself” (Likens, 2005, p. 30). As athletic and academic leaders continue to build their institutional athletic empires, they continue to assert, “Athletics helped mold good character and moral habits while providing a strong complement to their institution’s academic mission” (Flowers, 2009, p. 356).

Having quality athletic teams at higher education institutions is an American phenomenon that has many indirect benefits to the university; therefore, it remains a staple department/program in universities across the country (Getz & Siegfried, 2010). Brad Humphreys (2006), Associate Professor at University of West Virginia specializing in sport economics, looked at the relationship between college football programs and state appropriations to higher education public institutions by utilizing data collected from 570 public universities, between 1976 and 1996. Humphreys found that institutions with Division I football teams collected almost 60% more in-state appropriations than those without football teams. Successful football programs received 3% to 8% more money from their state legislature than comparable universities without Division I football programs.

Athletics, as a co-curricular activity, enhances the academic mission of higher education institutions by creating an enriched sense of community and by increasing the academic vitality of the university (Holbrook, 2004). In 2008, Linda Sharp, Professor of sports administration at the University of Northern Colorado, and Holly Sheilley, Assistant Athletic Director for student development and championships at the University of Louisville, wrote an article concerning a university and athletic department's ethical responsibility to offer student-athletes a meaningful education. If, in fact, the primary purpose of a higher education institution is to provide an education for all students, these institutions must carefully consider their obligation to provide a meaningful education to student-athletes (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Le Baron Russell Briggs (1901) stated:

The college sends her alumni into the world with nothing more than a warrant that they are presentable intellectually. Yet her unwritten and unspoken purpose is not

so much intellectual as moral; and her strongest hope is to stamp her graduates with an abiding character. (p. 1)

If collegiate institutions have a commitment to all students to provide an education that will prepare them intellectually and morally for the world outside of higher education (Briggs, 1901), and if student-athletes/athletics are vital to the academic mission of higher education, then it is essential that the academic community understand the holistic experience and learning needs of student-athletes.

Athletic departments provide institutions with a platform on which to build a strong community, prestige, and a fortuitous opportunity to set the institution apart from other schools (Getz & Siegfried, 2010). Karen Holbrook (2004), president of Ohio State University from 2002 to 2007 stated that:

Our purpose is not to separate athletics and keep it from diluting academics; our challenge is to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities available to boost our academic programs by embracing athletics, strengthening connections with academic units, and creating a richer university experience for all students. (p. 31)

Without intercollegiate athletics, many of the athletics- born traditions that are significant in building and maintaining a strong campus community would not exist, such as, marching band, cheer squads, alumni relation events, and many community outreach programs (Holbrook, 2004). These co-curricular activities provide an opportunity for students to belong to something outside of a purely academic focused group. Richard Light (2001) was invited by two Harvard University presidents to explore the choices students make in college and understand why some students make the most of their college experiences while others do not. Light interviewed 1,600 Harvard students over a 10-year span, collecting stories and strategies students use for academic success. In his

book, Light reports that four out of five students indicated that an event happening outside of the classroom changed them profoundly while in college. Based on Light's findings, co-curricular activities outside of the academic classroom are important and life-changing for most students attending college thus, an important piece of the puzzle in enhancing the academic mission.

Many athletic directors and presidents of universities utilize athletic events to improve the overall image of the university and to lure potential top-tier students, alumni support, donors, business leaders, public officials, and to increase enrollment (Holbrook, 2004; Watt & Moore III, 2001). Athletic competitions and healthy school rivalries influence community support, attract prospective students, and provide a forum for higher education leaders to capitalize on the opportunities that intercollegiate athletics offer (Flowers, 2009). Inviting potential students and supporters to attend an athletic event provides an opportunity to not only discuss the athletic success and campus pride/community built around the athletic program, but also to discuss and highlight the great student and faculty academic achievements at the institution (Holbrook, 2004; Getz & Siegfried, 2010). Once potential students, donors, and leaders are present on university grounds, athletic directors and presidents work to build their support system, bolster donations, attract talented faculty members and students, and gain valuable resources for bettering academic programs (Holbrook, 2004). Many university leaders use athletics to link academia with community members, students, the general public, and to increase alumni support in order to build a sense of home town/state or school pride (Flowers, 2009). Though the "institutional benefits of college athletics are generally accepted,

concerns over the academic and personal development of student-athletes have surfaced over the past decade” (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011, p. 235). Does the university have an institutional obligation to provide student-athletes with opportunities, services, and learning opportunities that are unique and customized to accommodate their schedule and collegiate lifestyle?

### ***Institutional Obligation***

Higher education institutions have an obligation to provide all students with a meaningful education (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Assistant Professor of Law, Timothy Davis, looked at a university’s educational obligation to student-athletes and asserts (Davis, 1991, p. 747):

Colleges and universities make a contractual commitment to student-athletes. Yet, the contract documents establishing this relationship do not outline the duties of the college and university. As a result, colleges and universities escape liability for their failure to provide student-athletes with an educational opportunity.

With the increasing commercialization of college athletics, institutions must not compromise the academic integrity of the institution and neglect the academic needs of student-athletes in order to produce winning athletic programs (Davis, 1991). Davis asserts that many student-athletes depart college with a university degree, but without having gained basic educational skills and without having matured intellectually.

Njorarai Simiyu looked at various pieces of literature regarding institutional and individual challenges faced by student-athletes and concludes that each institution owes it to student-athletes to “provide a learning environment devoid of discrimination, marginalization, and one that promotes balanced emphasis on academics and athletics, quality faculty with healthy student and faculty interaction...” (Simiyu, 2010, p. 23).

Athletic departments are multi-faceted and provide various opportunities for athlete and non-athlete students to receive college credit, internships, and career focused experiences by serving as a graduate assistant, photographer, sportswriter/journalist, student athletic trainer, coaching assistant, ground keeper, etc. (Holbrook, 2004). Without an athletic department, these student opportunities would not exist. Academic institutions must “recognize and embrace the inherent value of the athletics mission” (Holbrook, 2004, p 30).

Sharp and Sheilley (2008) indicate that “The academic achievement of student athletes must be valued as much as athletic excellence” (p. 107). By viewing academic and athletic facilities as places where learning occurs, institutions can judge all buildings, fields, and facilities by the same standard, namely how well they educate students, support students’ needs, aid them in exploring ideas, and build character (Holbrook, 2004). Learning does not just occur in academic classrooms, but throughout campus buildings and facilities. In 2004, Kendra Hamilton, an author for Black issues in higher education conducted an interview with Dr. Ruth Darling, then President of the National Academic Advising Association and member of the NCAA. In a question regarding student-athlete challenges in the current academic advising environment, Dr. Ruth Darling indicated that to create a successful student-athlete, the institution and academic advisors must find a way to integrate the student-athlete and university’s passion for sport with the goals of higher education (Hamilton, 2004).

Ensuring that a student-athlete’s academic needs are supported to benefit their academic achievement and not solely their athletic eligibility is at times problematic in

higher education (Hamilton, 2004). Failure to complete academic tasks will negatively affect NCAA athletic eligibility (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Richard Kahlenberg, who has an interest in studying inequality in higher education, indicated in a convocation address for new students at Flagler College, it is an institution's obligation to ensure that advisors are helping all students choose an academic path they are interested in or passionate about, and that every student has an opportunity to enjoy the American Dream (Kahlenberg, 2011). Courses are frequently selected to fit a student-athlete's busy schedule, rather than to support their intellectual interests (Harmon, 2010). Student-athletes are often encouraged to enroll in courses that allow them to easily maintain their athletic eligibility, even if it is at the expense of benefitting them academically (Davis, 1991). In assisting student-athletes choose classes and an eventual major, Dr. Ruth Darling suggests it is important to make sure student-athletes feel connected and empowered by the choices they are making because if they are interested in the subject matter they are learning, they will be better athletes, students, and eventual members of the work force (Hamilton, 2004). Not all student-athletes enter college prepared to endure the strenuous academic curriculum, thus making it difficult for academic advisors to properly support their learning. Dr. Ruth Darling indicated that, "Academic advisers must consistently integrate the student's athletic passion with the goals for learning in a higher education culture" (Hamilton, 2004, p. 30).

The educational attainment of student-athletes has been a theme in higher education institutions for years; Phillip A. Whitner and Randall C. Myers conducted a case study of a student-athlete beginning the Fall Quarter of his freshman year in 1984.



The University of Toledo's Counseling Center developed the Athletes Educational Planning Program (AEPP) in response to some university professors and administrators concerned with the academic success of student-athletes (Whitner & Myers, 1986). The AEPP was utilized in this case study and identified the participant as a high-risk student when he entered college. Results of this case study reveal that when an underprepared student-athlete is admitted to a university, someone must take responsibility for ensuring the student has proper academic support. Whitner and Myers (1986) suggest that when a university actively recruits athletes that are marginally prepared academically, the institution has an obligation to "provide the services which are needed so these students have the opportunity to succeed academically" (p. 669). Whitner and Myers' (1986) recommendations based on their case study suggest that the institution should provide counseling, link marginally prepared students with remedial help, teach time management, offer traditional study skills instruction, afford instruction on how to properly utilize university support, etc. Since this study in 1984, support services for student-athletes have been well documented and established at many Division I universities. Now the question becomes, what does this support look like and how can a university provide an effective learning environment/learning opportunities based on the holistic and unique challenges faced by student-athletes?

Dr. Ruth Darling suggests that universities build a strong support structure for student-athletes academic learning that includes coach and faculty advising and empowering of the student-athlete (Hamilton, 2004). Though time spent on athletics is time spent away from traditional classroom academics, student-athletes learn time

management skills, how to work proficiently in teams, while challenging their minds and problem-solving skills (Holbrook, 2004) in the athletic domain. Student-athletes cannot be athletes at the university without also being students (Holbrook, 2004). In order to fulfill their academic and athletic role, student-athletes need a strong support system (Hamilton, 2004) put in place by the institution.

### **Experiences of the Student-Athlete**

Eddie Comeaux, Assistant Professor in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky, and Keith C. Harrison, Associate Professor and Director of the Paul Robeson Research Center for Academic and Athletic Prowess at the University of Central Florida in the College of Business Administration, developed a conceptual model to better understand and explain the “cumulative processes and characteristics—as a whole and in stages—that influence academic success for Division I student-athletes” (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011, p. 235). Comeaux and Harrison indicate that previous studies have neglected to properly distinguish the differences in the multiple influences in student-athletes lives, such as, the influence of sport commitment on their daily lives, the educational expectations, campus climate issues, and engagement of student-athletes in the academic campus environment. Comeaux and Harrison believe that a failure to understand the differing and unique experiences of student-athletes has led to “assumptions about student-athletes that too often present them through a deficit lens” (p. 235). A lack of understanding can have significant impact on grasping the unique needs, assistance/support necessary for student-athletes on college campuses (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

In developing a conceptual model, Comeaux and Harrison (2011) first explore the student-athlete experience in order to gain a full understanding of the “athletic subculture, the increasing commercialization of college sports, and academic engagement practices [that] might influence these students’ overall academic success” (p. 236). Then, they discuss the conceptual model they develop and follow up with a review of literature that supports their creation and use of the conceptual model. The model developed by Comeaux and Harrison involves precollege factors (family, individual attributes), initial commitments (personal goals, sport, and institutional), the social system (faculty, peer, coach interaction, grades intellectual development), and commitments of student-athletes (personal goals, sports, and institutional). These combined factors inform the academic success of student-athletes in college. Comeaux and Harrison found that the relationship student-athletes develop with faculty and a non-athlete peer is directly related to academic success because such relationships “provide opportunities for mutual assistance and support” (p. 241) and are “likely to enhance rather than impede student-athletes’ academic success” (p. 241). Comeaux and Harrison indicate that with the development of their model in parallel with existing literature, it becomes apparent that Division I student-athletes are not all the same, and their holistic experiences require student affairs leaders, academic advisors/counselors, coaches, professors, etc. to “identify factors that may impede or facilitate their learning and personal development” (p. 242) while student-athletes are in college.

Elizabeth Aires, Danielle McCarthy, Peter Salovey, and Mahzarin Banaji (2004) conducted a comparison study of student-athletes and non-athletes at a highly selective

liberal arts college and an Ivy League university, over a four-year period, concerning academic performance and personal development. Each author/researcher works within the Department of Psychology at various colleges/universities. Participants were all part of the graduating class of 2000 and surveys were collected in five waves over the four-year period. Between 400 and 1000 surveys were collected in each wave, and questions were framed around expectations (wave 1) and actual experiences (wave 2-5). One question asked that is relevant to the interest of this paper is “Do student-athletes see group membership posing greater difficulties to academic performance than members of non-athletic extracurricular groups” (p. 589)? Results indicate that high commitment athletes reported more academic difficulty each year with regard to gaining respect from their professors and earning good grades. Though many student-athletes reported challenging obstacles to academic success and entered college with less confidence in their academic abilities to be successful, “These student athletes showed no significant academic underperformance compared to other students who entered college with similar demographic profiles and SAT scores” (p. 597). This study, though limited by self-reported behaviors, presents interesting results. Although student-athletes might feel that they are academically challenged and less capable of academic success, when looking at performance-based tests and grades, according to Aries et al. (2004), student-athletes are performing at similar rates to non-athletes entering college at a similar skill level.

Student-athletes frequently find the academic environment challenging and unforgiving. When trying to fill multiple roles, student-athletes can “lose focus and control over their academic lives, and eventually become stressed to a point where are

they are choosing one role over the other” (Stansbury, n.d., p. 10). A student-athlete’s inability to focus and engage can be harmful to them in the classroom (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). The lack of focus and engagement at times leads others to believe they “possess innate athletic superiority but lack any academic competencies or abilities” (Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995, p. 217).

Aimee Kimball, a Professor in the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Tennessee, and Valeria Freysinger, Associate Professor in the Physical Education, Health, and Sport Studies (PHS) Department at Miami University, conducted a qualitative interview approach study influenced by phenomenology to look at collegiate athletes and stress (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). The study was comprised of a purposive and convenience sample of student-athletes. Nine sports were represented with seven males and seven females. Participants self-identified as Caucasian (7), African-American (5), and bi-racial (2). The interviews lasted 40-80 minutes and themes were identified in order to categorize and recognize similarities in individual athlete experiences. The study results reveal that “Sport participation was viewed as an enjoyable and satisfying activity that relieved and allowed them to better cope with and negotiate some of their daily stress” (p. 124) while also causing some stress (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). Though the study reports that sport participation taught student-athletes how to cope with stress and handle multiple demands of time and energy, some student-athletes experienced sport participation as stressful as the student-athlete lacked any control over their schedule and life. A main finding of this study is that “stress as a

student-athlete is experienced both negatively and positively and changes across situation and over time” (p. 134).

Student-athlete participation in college sports lends the opportunity to interact with people from different cultural groups and with diverse racial ethnicities and backgrounds (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). Student-athletes frequently learn, practice, and compete in a diverse environment in athletics and thrive, so why do they seemingly struggle to “fit in” in the academic setting? Though it is documented that athletic privilege comes with being a student-athlete on many college campuses (Watson, 2005) within the academic setting, athletes are sometimes viewed as academic misfits and disengaged from academia (Watt & Moore III, 2001; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). Edward Etzel, A.P. Ferrante, and James Pinkey (as cited by Harmon, 2010) suggest that, if negative perceptions and/or misperceptions of student-athletes as “dumb jocks or as an overprivileged group of academically undermotivated individuals” (p. 27) persists, this could quickly lead to the higher education community being unsupportive of an extremely diverse student group on college grounds.

### ***Structure (schedule and commitments)***

The proscribed student-athlete schedule has limited flexibility, required practice hours, lifting/conditioning, and mandated travel requirements (Carodine et al., 2001; Jordan & Denson, 1990; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). These required activities are in addition to a student-athlete’s class schedule, homework/study time, group projects, individual meetings with faculty, etc. This schedule takes a mental and physical toll on the student-athlete (Carodine et al., 2001), which can drive an individual athlete to

experience burn-out (Simiyu, 2010). In addition to playing a sport, student-athletes are also “students, struggling with their course work, exploring their identity, and learning to navigate social relationships” (Harmon, 2010, p. 28), all while balancing an extremely busy schedule with athletics consuming at minimum 20 hours a week. When a disproportionate amount of time is devoted to athletics, the academic focus and achievement of the student-athlete may suffer (Simiyu, 2010). Simiyu concludes in his article regarding institutional and individual challenges faced by student-athletes that better planning at the institution could facilitate student-athlete success both in their given sport and in the academic setting.

J. Christopher Jolly, the Student-Athlete Academic Specialist for the Bickerstaff Academic Center for Student-Athletes under the Division of Academic Affairs at California State University, Long Beach in 2008, indicated that there are various aspects of being a student-athlete that create significant challenges concerning ongoing and consistent athletic and academic success (Jolly, 2008). Student-athletes possess their own unique culture outside of the traditional student population (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991), which can create a feeling of isolation from the general student population. Joshua C. Watson, Associate Professor in the Department of Counselor Education, Mississippi State University-Meridian and Daniel B. Kissinger, Associate Professor of Counselor Education Rehabilitation, Human Resources and Communication Disorders at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville conducted a study using a holistic wellness paradigm to “explore the adjustment of student-athletes and nonathletes” (Watson & Kissinger, 2007, p. 153) at a Division I institution. Watson and Kissinger’s reported results indicate

that non-athletes have higher levels of wellness than non-athletes and student-athletes “represent a unique, clearly identifiable, college student population” (p. 153). While student-athletes are “commonly venerated for their athletic aptitude and success and on many campuses enjoy celebrity status, on the other hand, this acclaim often obscures the heightened challenges they encounter as they attempt to balance the dual roles of student and athlete” (p. 153). The student-athlete culture, like all cultures, has dominant norms, values, rules, and a philosophy that is reflected by and unquestioned by members of the group (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). Though many positive benefits are associated with being a student-athlete, for some, sport participation can lead to “issues of maladjustment, emotional illness, and psychological distress” (Watson, 2005, p. 442) in the academic and other settings.

Student-athletes face many unique challenges while in college (Jolly, 2008), including balancing weight-training, conditioning, individual skill development, daily team practices, weekly competition, attending classes, studying, group projects, and completing homework/assignments (Simiyu, 2010; Simons et al., 1999). This fully packed schedule inadvertently affects student-athletes as they “miss out on the learning that takes place from interacting with peers and engaging in other educational activities outside of the classroom and off the field” (Gayles & Hu, 2009, p. 316). Adler and Adler (1985) conducted a qualitative, participant observation study at a major college basketball program between 1980 and 1984. Using team research field strategies in their research, Adler and Adler uncovered the extreme “academic detachment that college athletes experience while attempting to be both academically and athletically successful” (p. 38).



Adler and Adler indicate that as student-athletes began to realize the difficulty of maintaining balance in their academic and athletic schedule, their optimism was replaced with cynicism, as their schoolwork load was more than they could handle.

Student-athletes spend a considerable amount of time participating in their given sport, which can negatively influence their academic focus (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). The expectations of student-athletes to be successful in their athletic role are high, as most student-athletes carry a full load of classes and practice on average 4 hours a day (Simons et al., 1999). This dedication to athletics during their sport season requires them to miss classes frequently as they deal with team/sport commitments, exhaustion, and nurture nagging to serious bodily injury (Simons et al., 1999; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). Mary Howard-Hamilton, an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations at the University of Florida, and Julie A. Sina, Dean of Students and Adjunct Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations at the University of Florida, wrote a book chapter in 2001 that discusses how college affects student-athletes. They indicate that it is important to understand the growth and developmental issues student-athletes face and that it is the responsibility of faculty and administrators to support and challenge them in their collegiate journey as a student-athlete (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). Student-athletes have an extremely regimented and strict daily schedule. Their coaches, advisors, NCAA, and the athletic department dictate their academic schedule, athletic schedule, and even their social lives (Jolly, 2008).

The athletic commitment and time demands placed on student-athletes have been known to have negative effects on their academic success (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008), but not all literature supports this notion. George Kuh who has written extensively about student engagement, institutional improvement, and university culture; Jillian Kinzie who has worked in academic and student affairs administration; Jennifer Buckley who is interested in teaching and learning environments and faculty-student interactions; Brain Bridges who is interested in racial and ethnic equity; and John Hayek who is interested in postsecondary education, student engagement, and public policy in higher education, all joined in to work on piecing together the student success puzzle. They indicate that many student-athletes frequently engage in effective academic practices and the time and effort they put into learning is related and vital to increasing their engagement in academic related activities (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). Kuh et al. report that student-athletes are often as engaged in effective academic practices, are satisfied with the quality of academic advising they receive, and are more likely to participate in community service projects, than their non-athlete peers. This finding supports the idea that student-athletes need continued guidance in setting academic goals, to interact with faculty frequently, to engage in peer-group discussions, and to put time and energy into effective learning practices in order to be successful in the academic learning environment (Simiyu, 2010).

***Perception (of self and by others)***

Sherry K. Watt, Assistant Professor in the Department of Counseling, Rehabilitation, and Student Development at the University of Iowa, and James L. Moore

III, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of South Carolina-Columbia, wrote a book chapter in 2001 that explores who student-athletes are and describes/discusses the student-athlete experience from a historical and cultural perspective. As the unique and demanding schedule of a student-athlete is uncovered, Watt and Moore (2001) indicate that it is no surprise that “For many student athletes, the identity as student takes a backseat to the identity as athlete” (p.13). Watt and Moore suggest that this can be dangerous and detrimental to the athlete’s student identity because their athlete identification “can lead to the perpetuation of stereotypes in which student athletes are portrayed as academically unqualified, unintelligent, and socially impotent” (p. 13).

Herbert D. Simons (University of California, Berkeley), Corey Bosworth (Harvard University), Scott Fujita (University of California, Berkeley), and Mark Jenson (University of California, Berkeley) conducted a study of 538 college student-athletes participating in 27 intercollegiate sports from a large NCAA Division I institution (Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jenson, 2007). Their sample included 108 revenue sport athletes (i.e. basketball and football) and 430 non-revenue athletes, with 167 freshman, 133 sophomores, 140 juniors, and 95 seniors. Out of a total of 800 student-athletes at the university, the 538 student-athlete sample collected was 314 male and 224 female. The sample was predominately white. There were 376 student-athletes that identified as white, 63 student-athletes that identified as African American, and 65 athletes that identified as other. In this study, Simons et al. asked the student-athletes how they felt they were perceived and treated by other students and faculty members. The study results

indicate that 33% of the student-athletes self-reported they were perceived negatively by professors, while 59.1% felt their peers (other students) viewed them negatively as well. Only 15% of student-athletes reported they felt they were positively perceived by others, while 61.5% reported they were refused, or given a hard time, when requesting accommodations for their absence in class to sport competitions. Also, 62.1% of student-athletes in this study stated that a faculty member made a negative comment about student-athletes in class. Unfortunately, it is common that faculty members are unprepared to teach in an environment where students background, ethnicity, culture, social status and native language differ from their own (Skubikowski, Vright, & Graf, 2009; Adams & Love, 2009).

The term stereotype threat was coined by Steele and Aronson to explain that a “negative stereotype about a social group in a particular task domain could reduce the quality of performance exhibited by members of that group” (Beilock & McConnell, 2004, p. 598). When a social group becomes aware of a negative stereotype, that social group’s performance is likely to suffer because they begin to question their abilities and believe the negative perceptions that others have attributed to them (Beilock & McConnell, 2004). If student-athletes confirm the negative stereotype suggesting they are “less engaged and competent academically than other students” (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005, p. 329), might this jeopardize their ability to perform successfully on academically driven tasks?

Herbert D. Simons, Associate Professor of Education at the University of California, Berkeley, Derek Van Rhee, a lecturer of Education at the University of

California, Berkeley, and Martin V. Covington, a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley conducted a study at a NCAA Division I institution, University of California Berkeley, from 1993 to 1994 (Simons, Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). This study represented 22 Varsity sports teams and 361 student-athletes (2/3 male and 1/3 female). Simons et al. utilized a 5-point Likert scale survey to study the motivational orientation student-athletes had towards academic performance and identification, and they found that “self-worth was determined by an individual’s own, and others’, perceptions of one’s ability, perceptions that are mainly tied to successful achievement” (p. 152). Simons et al. used Covington’s self-worth theory and four typologies (failure avoiders, failure acceptors, overstrivers, and success-oriented) to categorize student-athlete motivation. The results of this study suggests that failure avoiders (avoid activities they fear they might fail) and failure acceptors (not afraid of failure or success) were more committed to their athletic role and had poorer academic performance in comparison to those student-athletes that were overstrivers (fear of failure motivates them) and success-oriented (not afraid to fail). These results are important because understanding what motivates student-athletes to be successful can inform athletic and academic personnel to be more intentional in how they develop/create learning opportunities for student-athletes.

Catherine Engstrom, formerly the Assistant Director of Resident Life at the University of Maryland, College Park, and William Sedlacek, Assistant director of testing and research in the Counseling Center and professor of education at the University of Maryland-College Park, randomly sampled 293 entering first year students at a large

NCAA Division I eastern university (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991). They used the Situation Attitude Scale (SAS) tool for measuring student attitudes towards others and situations while in college. The sample was 51% women and 49% men. Nearly 75% of the sample was white, 11% Asian, 8% Black, 3% Hispanic, and 1% identified as other. The results of the study indicate that many myths and stereotypes attributed to student-athletes went from being “the campus hero to [...] the campus idiot” (p. 189). Engstrom and Sedlacek confirm that the student-athlete group is a “culture prone to prejudice in the campus community and confirms the types of situations eliciting negative feelings” (p. 191). Student-athletes who internalize negative stereotypes and perceived academic failure can develop low motivation, avoid activities where they feel failure, and focus on activities where they experience success (Simons et al., 1999). In order to avoid feelings of shame and scrutiny based on their academic performance, student-athletes limit the energy expended in the academic setting and engage in “self-handicapping behaviors such as procrastination, handing in assignments late, test anxiety...” (Simons et al., 1999, p. 153) and use these as excuses for low performance.

The previously noted study conducted by Adler and Adler (1985) reveals how the pressure and rewards experienced in school, peer culture, athletics, etc., led student-athletes to allow their lives to become engulfed by athletics, at the expense of their academic identification. Simons et al. (1999) report that many student-athletes already have a perceived history of failing, which can hinder their ability to be academically successful. Student-athletes, particularly first year students, more frequently believe that

their academic skills are lacking and their chances to succeed academically in college are slim (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991).

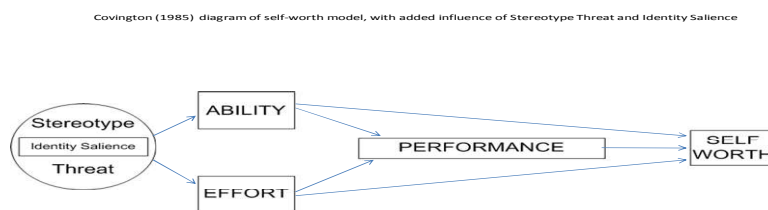
In a study conducted by Shelley Armstrong (Centenary College of Louisiana) and Jody Oomen-Early (Walden University), collegiate athletes and non-athletes were compared to determine if there were any significant difference in the perceived levels of self-esteem, depression, and social connectedness (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009). The participants in this study were a voluntary sample of undergraduate students at a small, private, liberal-arts college in the South. There were 227 participants (75% White, 9.7% Black, 7.9% Hispanic, and 2.2% Asian/Pacific Islander) with 59.9% female and 45.8% reporting being a member of a NCAA Division I varsity athletic team. Armstrong and Oomen-Early collected data from participants in the cafeteria during lunch/dinner hours utilizing a survey in which the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The results indicate that collegiate athletes have greater self-esteem than non-athletes, greater social connectedness than non-athletes, and lower depression than non-athletes. These results are compatible with other research studies in reporting how student-athletes feel when they identify as an athlete, but research also indicates that student-athletes are less confident in their abilities and less connected to their social surroundings when they identify as a student in the academic environment (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005).

Individuals can have multiple social identities and when primed with certain identities, can affect their performance on tasks (Yopyk & Prentice, 2005). Darren Yopyk and Deborah Prentice (2005) conducted research that examined the influence of tasks on

the salience of competing identities of student-athletes. In line with prior research, Yopyk and Prentice found that “Those primed with their athlete identity had lower self-regard and performed less well on a challenging math test than did those primed with their student identity” (p. 329). The study participants were from the Princeton University varsity football team, men’s ice hockey team, and men’s a cappella singing groups (67 total participants). The participants completed two questionnaires. In the second questionnaire the participants were primed with their extracurricular identity, their student identity, or no identity, and then asked to complete a math test. As Yopyk and Prentice suspected, the student- athletes primed with their athletic identity performed worse on the test than the group of student-athletes that were primed with no identity or their student-identity.

Martin Covington (1984) presents a self-worth model of causality (figure 1), which assumes that many factors influence the sense of worth and adequacy of a person, including “performance level, self-estimates of ability, and degree of effort expenditure” (p. 8). In the self-worth model, Covington asserts that Ability and Effort are linked to Performance, while Performance is linked to Self-Worth.

**Figure 2**





Self-worth theory builds on the work of Atkinson and Weiner (Simons, Van Rhee, & Covington, 1999). Covington (1992) indicates that self-worth theory “assumes that the search for self-acceptance is the highest human priority and that in schools self-acceptance comes to depend on one’s ability to achieve competitively” (p. 74). Additionally, self-worth theory indicates that, “A central part of all classroom achievement is the need for students to protect their sense of worth or personal value” (Covington, 1984, p. 4). Therefore, an individual’s success signifies ability in competing and thus can enhance one’s self worth. Naturally, people avoid situations where they feel failure is more likely than success because they do not want to seem incompetent or unable to be competitive and successful (Covington, 1984).

### ***Support Services and Resources***

By virtue of being a student-athlete, “Demands on the individual athlete predispose one to potential failure in achieving both academic and athletic success” (Simiyu, 2010, p. 16). Therefore, student-athletes need a great amount of faculty attention and academic support (Shea et al., 2003). Support personnel that are educated and properly informed on the student-athlete experience can be a supportive ally (Harmon, 2010). Joshua C. Watson, an assistant professor of counselor education at Mississippi State University-Meridian, conducted a study at a doctoral/research intensive NCAA Division I southeastern university, representing 135 student-athletes and 137 non student-athletes from all grade levels (Watson, 2005). Utilizing the Expectations About Counseling-Brief Form (EAC-B) on a 7-point Likert scale, Watson compared attitudes toward self-seeking behavior and students’ expectations regarding counseling services.

Watson's research suggested that 10%-15% of student-athletes suffer negatively from sport participation and need clinical attention. However, Watson indicated that student-athletes frequently choose not to utilize services to address their problems because they are "apprehensive of being stigmatized by coaches, teammates, student peers, and fans" (p. 442). A student-athletes inability to seek help when needed can perpetuate the perception of them as incapable, unintelligent, and/or maladjusted in the academic setting.

Literature suggests that student-athletes have a unique college experience and are faced with many challenges regarding their athletic and academic participation. Literature highlights the need for proper guidance and resources available to student-athletes so they can actively participate in the academic and athletic community in higher education institutions. Joy Gaston Gayles, a professor at the University of North Carolina State University and Shouping Hu, a professor at Florida State University, conducted a study of student-athletes utilizing the Basic Academic Skills Study (BASS), which is a multifaceted scale designed and utilized by the NCAA to measure a student-athlete's interests, attitudes, and academic skills (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Gayles and Hu found that "Interaction with faculty, interaction with other students, and participation in academic related activities were significantly and positively related to the learning and communication skills reported by those student athletes" (p. 326). Gayles and Hu also found that despite gender, ethnicity, race, or major, the types of activities student-athletes engage in while in college does have an impact on their personal self-concept, personal development, and learning/communication skills. Creating a learning environment that is

conducive and welcoming to all students in order to prevent unintentional marginalization of individual or student groups on campus, as well as teaching student-athletes how to properly transfer the skills they use to be successful in their athletic environment into the classroom, is essential.

Frequently, student-athlete support services are isolated and located off campus, rather than centrally located in an easily accessible place for all (Jordan & Denson, 1990; Harmon, 2010). Janice M. Jordan, Associate Director and Eric L. Denson, Counseling Psychologist, (1990) describe a comprehensive outreach program designed to provide student services for collegiate athletes. Jordan and Denson indicate that support services for student-athletes should provide academic monitoring of student-athletes, which entails registering for classes, grade monitoring, and consultation with faculty and academic services, in support of satisfactory progress towards degree progress. Some academic advisors steer athletes into a specific major or degree program because they believe it will be easier for the student-athlete to complete their course work and remain NCAA academically eligible (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). Around 2007-2008, the NCAA conducted a survey of 21,000 college athletes regarding the student-athlete experience. The NCAA reported that one in five athletes stated that being a student-athlete prevented them from choosing their major of choice (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008) because they did not have the time necessary or flexibility in their schedule to devote to their preferred course path. So instead, student-athletes are frequently funneled into whatever is considered the “easiest” major at the institution (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). The Student Services for Athletes (SSA) program described by Jordan and Denson (1990) recognizes the unique

situation and challenges faced by student-athletes, and provide student services to athletes in a location and at a time that is convenient for them. SSA serves as a liaison between student-athletes, coaches, faculty, staff, and other university affiliated departments and monitors academic achievement and academic needs (Jordan & Denson, 1990).

Student-athletes require strong and consistent support services. In order to provide these services, everyone who works with student-athletes must think about their own “socialization into an athletic culture that values the story over the truth and examine how we’ve come by our own perceptions and perhaps even stereotypes of student athletes and athletics” (Harmon, 2010, p. 28). At times, student support services, such as counseling, advising, workshops, and other student programs, are offered during times when students are practicing, traveling, and unable to participate or utilize the services offered (Jordan & Denson, 1990). Jordan and Denson indicate that student-athletes need these services to be offered when it is conducive to their schedule; otherwise, student-athletes have difficulty physically getting the academic support they need. Many student-athletes feel it is impermissible to miss practice to attend a class or a required lab because they conflict with practice times, so “Coaches must interact with athletic department [academic] support staff to help facilitate student athlete academic achievement” (Sharp & Sheilley, 2007, p. 109) when conflicts arise. Student-athletes need guidance and support in balancing their daily athletic and academic commitments (Simiyu, 2010). In the previously noted study by Watson and Kissinger (2007), their findings suggest “College counselors would benefit from a better understanding of the factors affecting the physical

health, mental health, and well-being of college student-athletes” (p. 153), given that over 260,000 students participate in NCAA intercollegiate sports.

When a faculty member lacks understanding and empathy towards student-athletes and their regimented schedule, they begin to run out of patience, develop negative stereotypes, and react negatively to a student-athlete’s stringent schedule (Simiyu, 2010). So, faculty members must be (Sharp & Sheilley, 2007, p. 110):

Educated about the time demands and pressure that all student athletes experience – with a clear message from athletics, however, that these pressures do not mean that student athletes are seeking reduction in the expectations of achievement in classes.

A study conducted by C. Keith Harrison, Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Arizona State University, Eddie Comeaux and Michelle Plecha, Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at University of California-Los Angeles explored the relationship between faculty members and student-athletes, focusing on the impact of student-athlete and faculty interaction on academic achievement (Harrison, Comeaux, & Plecha, 2006). The sample for this study included 693 football and basketball players attending predominantly white institutions. The study used the Input-Environmental-Output (I-E-O) model to study the impact of college on students. The results reveal that faculty who provide “intellectual challenges and stimulation for their students, encouraged graduate school, and helped in achieving professional goals, made a relatively strong contribution to student success” (p. 281).

In the previously noted study by Sharp and Sheilley (2007) regarding the ethical responsibility of academic and athletic personnel to offer student-athletes a meaningful education, Sharp and Sheilley report there is a high level of influence and control

possessed by a student-athlete's coach. Sharp and Sheilley found it was crucial that a coach fostered a culture that promoted academic well-being and academic importance, allowing a nice balance between dedication to sports and academics so student-athletes felt supported in their commitment to being a student. Since student-athletes hold their coaches' opinions in such high regard, when a coach encourages self-worth as a student and an athlete, student-athletes feel more apt to nurture their academic role and not only view themselves as worthy of athletic success (Sharp & Sheilley, 2007). Negative comments stated directly or indirectly by coaches, professors, and other students can further stigmatize and isolate student-athletes (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008).

Sharp and Sheilley (2007) indicate that the athletic and academic groups should join forces and begin to discuss the role of student-athletes, the academic success they are capable of, and showcase that coaches and academic support services are in support of student-athlete academic success (Sharp & Sheilley, 2007). Simons et al. (1999) suggest in their findings that "College staff and faculty, with the cooperation of the athletic department, need to be more involved in the lives of student athletes" (Simons et al., 1999, p. 160). In addition to faculty, athletic staff must be in constant contact with student affairs practitioners and discuss what is working and what can be improved when working directly with student-athletes (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001).

Research conducted by Patricia Lally, Department of Health and Physical Education, Lock Haven University, and Gretchen Kerr, Department of Health and Physical Education, University of Toronto, examined the relationship between student-athlete career planning and the dual role of athlete and student (Lally & Kerr, 2005).

Lally and Kerr completed a series of two retrospective, in-depth interviews, with four male and four female student-athletes. Lally and Kerr found that many student-athletes are less capable of making mature decisions regarding their educational and career path than their non-athlete student peers. So, student-athletes get privileges that non student-athletes might view as unnecessary and unwarranted (early priority registration, flexibility in turning assignments in, taking tests while traveling, etc.) (Sharp & Sheilley, 2007). Sharp and Sheilley discuss the purpose of the CHAMPS program as developing the holistic student-athlete in five core areas: personal, career, service, athletic, and academics, and to create a support system around the student-athlete promoting success in all facets of life (Sharp & Sheilley, 2007). The CHAMPS program is supported by the NCAA as they provide grants to institutions that can be used to create, build, and support this program (Sharp & Sheilley, 2007). One goal of this program is to provide support to student-athletes “who face an atypical lifestyle with many time demands and challenges” (Sharp & Sheilley, 2007, p. 111).

## **Framework**

### ***Foundational Perspective / Lens: Learning Sciences – Sociocultural Perspective***

In framing teaching and learning practices for the purposes of this paper, I draw from the Learning Sciences literature, specifically with a sociocultural perspective. Moje and Lewis (2012), who believe that a critical sociocultural perspective is vital in understanding learning opportunities, argue that learning is a social process and involves the participation or engagement of people within a group, a social context, a space, etc., and occurs within *discourse communities* (Moje & Lewis, 2012). Moje and Lewis

describe discourse communities as “groupings of people—not only face to face or actual in-the-moment groupings, but also ideational groupings across time and space—that share ways of knowing, thinking, believing, acting, and communicating...” (p. 16). If the idea is accepted that learning is bound within discourse communities, that a constant battle for access to resources exists, and that not everyone within a discourse community is viewed and/or treated fairly and equally by all parties, then one must “acknowledge that learning is shaped by and mired in power relations” (Moje & Lewis, 2012, p.17). Moje and Lewis state that focus must be placed on the role power plays in environments where learning opportunities are presented. Mike Rose (1989) indicates that practices and policies around literacy and learning hinder our ability to properly educate people in America. Rose argues that as educators we must challenge the currently held perceptions regarding learning and shift away from the accepted views. Rose stated:

Through all my experiences with people struggling to learn, the one thing that strikes me most is the ease with which we misperceive failed performance and the degree to which this misperception both reflects and reinforces the social order. (p. 205)

As I think about student-athletes who struggle to learn within the boundaries of the educational community, the ideas expressed by Moje and Lewis, and Rose resonate. If student-athletes are members of an educational community/group and are perceived to be incapable contributors or academic failures, they will remain low within the power structure of that community and struggle to take advantage of learning opportunities presented. Does the community or group in the athletic environment encourage learning differently than in the academic environment?



Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2012) indicate that the “production of knowledge is integrally related to learning and to the opportunities that young people have for learning” (p. 4). Wenger (2000) defines learning as the interplay between the social competence that has been established by communities in time and our personal experience and view of the world as part of a given community. Wenger suggests that “knowing, therefore, is a matter of displaying competences defined in social communities” (p. 226). So, learning happens when competence and experience converge, creating a community. We identify strongly with some communities, while we struggle to find any identification with others: “We define ourselves by what we are not as well as by what we are, by the communities we do not belong to as well as by the ones we do” (Wenger, 2000, p. 239). Student-athletes are part of the academic community, though literature suggests that their identification as a student is much weaker than their identification as an athlete. If athletes do not have a strong connection to the academic community of which they are part, will their ability and opportunity to learn and be successful students suffer? Wenger states that a “healthy identity is socially empowering rather than marginalizing,” (p.240) so if student-athletes have a weak identity in the established educational community, their opportunity to learn might be compromised. What within the athletic and academic spaces influences successful learning? Do the established relationships between student-athlete and their coaches and/or instructors have an impact on learning?

Rogers and Fuller (2012) discuss the significance of a community of practice within the classroom. Rogers and Fuller talk about the designing of communities of

practice and the redesigning of communities of practice within an adult education classroom. In discussing available designs, Roger and Fuller explain that each person brings a history, perception, or experience with learning/education and they carry pre-conceived notions or expectations into the learning space. Roger and Fuller discuss the relevance of bridging the gap “between the students’ current experiences and their expectations based on their histories of participation with schooling” (p. 97). In designing an effective community of practice, Rogers and Fuller demonstrate that it is important to “recognize the history of participation” (p. 76) people bring with them to the classroom, create a space where “storylines about what school is and should be are affirmed, and then reconstruct new models of engagement with education that challenges unproductive storylines” (p. 77). Being cognizant of each student’s background and experience with education provides an awareness and opportunity for instructors and students alike to participate in designing a classroom, or learning space, that is sensitive to the diverse background and lived experiences of each student. If instructors are aware of the challenges, perceptions, and self-inhibiting behaviors student-athletes, as well as other students, bring into the academic learning environment, teachers can better design a learning space or “community of practice” that is suitable for all students.

### ***Higher Education Perspective / Lens: Inclusive Excellence***

In higher education institutions, nurturing and catering to the needs of the “whole student” has recently taken on new meaning (Harmon, 2010). Student-athletes have unique experiences in college and educators must evaluate how to best support their learning, development, academic interests, socialization with non-athletes, and career

development opportunities (Harmon, 2010). Harmon states that in order to take steps towards “bridging the chasm between athletics and student affairs” (p. 27), faculty, staff, coaches, etc. must educate themselves about the student-athlete experience, examining one’s personal perception of student-athletes, and collaborating with everyone involved in supporting the learning needs and developmental opportunities of student-athletes. Student affair practitioners must understand how the tension and opposing forces between athletics and academics affect the daily lives of student-athletes (Watt & Moore III, 2001).

In order to create an inclusive learning environment, faculty members must strive to build relationships with students and empower them to be active participants in the academic environment (Salazar et al., 2010). Despite the years of evidence supporting the positive effects students and faculty experience from creating a diverse and inclusive classroom, many faculty members resort to teaching in a culturally neutral way (Quaye and Harper, 2007). Rather than championing inclusive excellence and engaging in critical pedagogical practices, some faculty members feel that it is easier, safer, and more convenient to ignore diverse practices to avoid the potential conflict that differing views might create (Quaye and Harper, 2007). However, this only exacerbates the isolation and marginalization of students within a classroom environment.

Myles Brand, the NCAA appointed president from 2003 to 2009, commented on a meeting between the faculty group known as the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics and several athletic directors (Pennington, 2004). In finding common ground and deciding upon shared goals, Brand indicated that “For there to be real change, everyone

must be heading in the same direction” (para. 7), faculty members and athletic department representatives alike. Robert Eno, an associate professor of East Asian studies at Indiana commented, “They [athletic directors] learned that we weren’t a bunch of radical, inflexible faculty addicted to yelling about athletics” (para. 12). Enhancing the relationship between faculty members and the athletic department will ease tension and provide an open forum for discussing and understanding the challenges faced by student-athletes in both the academic and athletic realms. Since the student-faculty relationship is vital to student achievement and student satisfaction (Shea et al., 2003), faculty/instructors can encourage and embrace student-athlete differences in the classroom, as opposed to shaping them so they fit into a preconceived mold of what a student typically looks like (Curtis, 2006).

Creating and fostering an inclusive classroom environment by responding to, changing, and diversifying curricula and teaching practices has become more relevant in academia in recent years (Salazar et al., 2010). The use of inclusive pedagogical models to alter or transform current educational teaching practices has been present in educational settings for several decades (Tuitt, 2003), but understanding what types of pedagogy work for certain groups and why these practices are successful is still unknown in many instances. Inclusive pedagogy is a term Tuitt (2003) uses to describe “an emerging body of literature that advocates teaching practices that embrace the whole student in the learning process” (p. 243). Research studies have indicated that a student’s cognitive development, ability to think critically, and problem-solving skills are enhanced when learning in a classroom that incorporates inclusive pedagogy and curricula (Quaye

and Harper, 2007). Educational institutions can help create an inclusive atmosphere by making a conscious effort to consider the unique needs of all students in the academic culture (Simiyu, 2010). Faculty members must be held accountable for the classroom environment they create; they must value the different experiences, perspectives, and learning styles of their students and peers in creating an inclusive environment, pedagogy, and curriculum (Quaye and Harper, 2007).

### ***Research Grounded in Theoretical Framework***

My research project aims to understand the dynamics of relationships and spaces in order to provide a better understanding of what types of teaching practices are more conducive to student-athlete learning and success within the academic learning space.

Quaye and Harper (2007) state the following:

Engaging in meaningful, but sometimes uncomfortable, discussions about racial/ethnic, gender, religious, and socioeconomic differences, as well as privilege in all its forms, affords students opportunities to think critically about topics to which they previously had not been exposed. (p. 34)

Student-athletes are viewed among the privileged when assuming their athletic identity, but may experience feelings of anxiety when placed in an environment where they are stigmatized for their athleticism, fearing that their only value to the school/classroom is physical in nature (Cheville, 2001).

Julie Cheville, Assistant Professor of Literacy Education in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University, observed key occurrences in the athletic and academic learning environment of members of a single intercollegiate basketball team over a two-year period (Cheville, 2001). Cheville argues that professors/instructors are typically unaware of the concerns and fears student-athletes bring to the classroom

environment, assuming athletes have a built-in support system through their sports teams. Cheville indicates that unfortunately, student-athletes at times fear that their athleticism will be “appropriated and used against them by those who have the power to deny or devalue their presence” (p. 4).

Curtis (2006) points out that student-athletes are motivated to be successful in athletic tasks because they use an ego orientation approach, which is highly dependent on being superior over others. Curtis suggests that student-athletes might be more successful academically if they changed or modified their approach when dealing with academic tasks from an ego-orientation to a task-orientation. Curtis argues that it is not appropriate to use ego-orientation in the academic environment, but rather task-orientation because it focuses on goal-setting and using success as a gauge for internal competence. Curtis states that if academic advisors recognize the importance in teaching the relevance of task-orientation, then advisors can begin to modify how student-athletes view goal-setting and achievement in the academic setting. Understanding what within relationships and spaces encourages and promotes student-athlete learning and success is embedded within my research.

### **Summary of What We Know Based on Literature**

The literature presented in this review serves to inform the reader that Division I student-athletes have experiences, challenges, and successes that affect their ability to learn. It also specifies how learning spaces are structured and how the relationships that exist within those spaces can aid or hinder student development and success. The NCAA was formed to govern college athletics and indicated their primary purpose was to

integrate, support, and maintain college athletics and academics as a single institutional body. Though efforts have been made and policies have been put in place to support the academic achievement of student-athletes, intercollegiate athletics are still viewed as incompatible with the goals of higher education. There is a need for future research to address this incompatibility.

Student-athletes have an inflexible schedule and are required to dedicate a large amount of time to being an athlete. This time imbalance is controversial and calls into question the academic qualification of student-athletes in higher education institutions. Therefore, student-athletes are perceived as motivated to be successful in the sports arena, but the same motivation is not always visible within the classroom. This leads some students and faculty to question student-athletes' commitment to academic excellence. Literature suggests that student-athletes are an important subpopulation of the university community, but their place and purpose as student-athletes on campus is not always clear and defined. So, understanding the holistic experience and mental/physical/emotional existence of student-athletes can enable the academic and athletic community to be more aware of their unique needs in both the academic and athletic learning spaces, thus adding to existing literature.

In order to support student-athlete learning, learning must be defined and understood foundationally, as well as, how teaching and learning is enacted within the academic learning space. From a sociocultural perspective, learning is more than the teaching and learning exchange between students, their peers, and faculty members in an educational setting. Literature supports that producing an effective learning space is about

understanding, designing, and assessing the environment or creating an environment/classroom space that allows for diversity (culturally, socially economically, politically, etc.), change and growth. Learning occurs by creating a space that encourages personal histories, perceptions, and expectations to be present, identified, and discussed, in order to design an effective learning environment that works for everyone. Being aware of the powerful or powerless players within a classroom community and bridging the gap to provide mutual understanding and mutual grounds to exist within will create an open and productive learning environment. Once a space, void of power struggles and marginalization is created, the task of utilizing inclusive teaching and learning practices and designing a critical pedagogy for a diverse classroom will become more feasible.

This review of literature supports the notion that higher education institutions have an obligation to provide an educational opportunity to all students. Athletics provide many benefits to the larger institutional mission, bringing in donations, alumni support, top-tier students and faculty, and local business and community support. The presence of athletics on campus creates a sense of pride and community for students, faculty, staff, and create long-lasting campus traditions. So, athletics are an important department in higher education institutions. Student-athletes are vital in ensuring athletic departments continue to exist and flourish. Ensuring that student-athletes are successful in their dual role requires proper and adequate support of their athletic and academic ventures. Proper and adequate support will only be realized if the student-athlete's experience is fully recognized and understood.



This literature review identifies the student-athlete's experience and uncovers available and needed resources/services required to properly support student-athlete learning. Student-athletes have difficulty balancing their schedule between school and sport since their time commitment to athletics is consuming and not flexible. Student-athletes spend a disproportionate amount of time on athletics, which can create a sense of detachment from the academic community. A student-athlete's academic identity can suffer due to this imbalance as many student-athletes identify as an athlete on campus, even in the learning environment. The perception of student-athletes as solely athletes can have negative repercussions and produce self-inhibiting behaviors. Therefore, adequate, reliable, and purposeful support services for student-athletes are vital in higher education institutions. Student-athletes need advisors, faculty members, and coaches that support their academic commitment to success and have a real understanding of their unique dual role on campus.

Creating an environment that is conducive to learning and welcoming of all students in order to prevent unintentional marginalization of individual or student groups on campus, as well as, teaching student-athletes how to properly transfer the skills they use to be successful in their athletic environment into the classroom, is essential. This paper serves to educate and inform all parties about the holistic experiences of student-athletes and the available and needed academic and athletic resources for student-athletes. It also discusses the relevance of teaching/learning and learning spaces in academic institutions from a sociocultural perspective, and expresses the importance of creating an

inclusive learning environment in higher education, supporting the academic success of all students.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Case Study Rationale**

Deciding what type of approach is most conducive to the problem defined within my study, as well as, what method best examines the different elements, is critical in designing a research study. Donald E Polkinghorne states, “The area to be studied should determine the inquiry methods” (2005, p. 138). Polkinghorne explains that qualitative data is “gathered primarily in the form of spoken or written language rather than in the form of numbers” (2005, p. 137). Qualitative research, as defined by John W. Creswell (2007), “begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). In researching this ascribed human problem, Creswell indicates that researchers use an “emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (p. 37).

Sociocultural learning looks at learning as a process; learning occurs when competence and experience converge, creating a community of people. Utilizing qualitative inquiry to gather data regarding how the participation of diverse people occurs within these communities, where the power structures lie, the perceptions individuals hold of each other and of the self, will allow a better understanding of what is enabling or

hindering successful learning. Rich qualitative data, once analyzed and understood, can inform the athletic and academic communities on how to redesign learning communities to create better opportunities and a more inclusive environment for everyone within that space.

The following questions guide this study:

1. What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the athletic learning space?
2. What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the academic learning space?

My study examines the relationships, shared experiences, perspectives, and interactions the DU Men's Basketball Team has with their peers, coaches, and instructors in defined spaces (athletic field/court, academic classroom), occurring in their natural setting, and develop an understanding regarding how these relationships/experiences affect learning opportunities. As a researcher, I will "empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and participants in a study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Polkinghorne states that "The unit of analysis in qualitative research is experience, not individuals or groups. Qualitative studies vary in the kinds of experience they investigate; yet, their interest is about the experience itself not about its distribution in a population" (2005, p. 139).

Choosing a qualitative approach that best fits my particular study requires an understanding of different approaches and their purpose. I looked at narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study as possible approaches.

After reviewing the aforementioned qualitative approaches, utilizing a single-case study approach is the most relevant method for examining and exploring my research topic.

### **Research Design – Single Case Study Qualitative Approach**

In creating my research design, I utilized a single-case study qualitative approach that “explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). In this single-case study, I have selected the DU Men’s Basketball Team as the single “bounded case to illustrate the issue” (Creswell, p.74). The aim of this proposed case study is to understand the experiences of the DU Men’s Basketball Team in order to gain knowledge regarding how successful learning occurs in both the athletic and academic learning environments.

Qualitative research is conducive to gathering in-depth, detailed descriptions of issues (Patton, 2002) through the participants’ perceptions. A qualitative research inquiry is fitting for my research study since “The key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Using a constructivist approach, “the researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data” (Creswell, 2003, p. 18) that can be coded and analyzed.

Student-athletes are integrated into NCAA Division I universities, but their ability to learn effectively in both their sport and in the classroom is not always evident. The purpose of this study is to utilize a single-case study design to understand how different

relationships and learning spaces affect student-athlete learning and success in higher education.

I created a methods matrix to identify what learning spaces are critical to explore, what my unit of analysis is, and what methods I will use that will be valuable for answering my research questions.

**Table 1**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Where will I find this information?</b>	<b>Unit of Analysis</b>	<b>What kind of information will I find?</b>	<b>What does that have to do with my broader question?</b>
What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the athletic learning space?	1. At practice 2. Academic Services 3. At Games 4. Weight Room	Individual Student-athlete	1. teammate/teammate interaction, coach/teammate interaction 2. teammate/teammate interaction, advisor/student-athlete interaction 3. Teammate/Teammate interaction, student-athlete/coach interaction, student-athlete/spectator 4. Teammate/Teammate interaction, Coach/student-athlete interaction, weight room coach/student-athlete interaction, student-athlete/student-athlete/interaction	Observing interactions and discussing experiences and perceptions within these spaces, I can begin to understand what influences learning and how learning occurs when these interactions take place within the athletic learning space.
What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the academic learning space?	1. In Classroom 2. Study Groups 3. Tutoring Session	Individual Student-athlete	1. non-athlete/student-athlete interaction, student-athlete/student-athlete interaction, student-athlete/instructor interaction 2. student-athlete/student-athlete interaction, student-athlete/non-athlete interaction, student-athlete/study group leader interaction 3. student-athlete/student-athlete interaction, student-athlete/tutor interaction, student-athlete/non-athlete interaction	Observing interactions and discussing experiences and perceptions within these spaces, I can begin to understand what influences learning and how learning occurs when these interactions take place within the academic learning space.

## **Participant Selection**

The DU Men's Basketball Team was chosen to participate in this case study with purpose. The concept of purposeful sampling means, "The inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Using a purposive selection process enabled me, the researcher, to select participants that would provide a fruitful experience with a substantial amount of useful information that directly related to the elements being analyzed/studied (Polkinghorne, 2005). The student-athlete participants included one incoming freshman (started classes at DU early), four freshman, one sophomore, three juniors, and one senior. Geographically, five students were from Colorado, three were from Texas, one was from Australia, and one was from New Mexico. Four student-athlete participants identified as Black, three identified as White, one identified as Hispanic, one identified as bi-racial (Black, White, and Native American), and one did not report his race. Each student-athlete participant interview took place in a building on the DU campus, chosen by the individual participant. The two focus groups took place in the Ritchie Center on the DU campus. The participants seemed relaxed and forthcoming in the individual interview conversations and focus group discussions, which produced rich conversation and abundant data.

Literature indicates that in the academic learning environment, student-athletes, namely high profile athletes like the DU Men's Basketball Team, have less motivation to be successful academically than they do athletically. As participants in this research study, a more holistic view and understanding of each member of the DU Men's

Basketball Team as athletes and as students will inform the athletic and academic community on how to better create an inclusive learning space. An inclusive learning space will enable all participants within the community to cater to the diverse needs of all types of students, empowering students to be active participants within the learning environment.

Choosing the DU Men's Basketball Team as my single-case study produced the critical data needed to provide insight into student-athlete learning opportunities and directly addressed the research questions driving this case study. Polkinghorne (2005) indicates, "Sampling carries the connotation that those chosen are a sample of a population and the purpose of their selection is to enable findings to be applied to a population" (p. 139). In choosing participants for this case study, engaging in purposive sampling provided participants whose individual experience spoke to my research questions, but not necessarily "produce[d] generalized descriptions that hold[s] for all who have had the experience" (Polkinghorne, 2005, 141).

I sent a recruitment letter (see Appendix A) via email to each member of the DU Men's Basketball Team inviting them to participate in this research study. With help from members of the DU administration and athletic coaching staff, I was able to set up a 15 minute meeting with the DU Men's Basketball Team and was allowed to introduce my research study. From that meeting, I was gained trust and was afforded the exposure/credibility I needed for members of the DU Men's Basketball Team to agree to participate in my research study. Within two days of my face-to-face meeting with the team, I began setting up interviews with the individual student-athletes via email and text



message. With all studies, limitations exist. The results will be representative of the DU Men's Basketball Team and will not be generalizable, though the findings will be informative for all student-athletes playing various sports at any higher education institution.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection is described by Creswell (2007) as “a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions” (p.118). This research study included individual interviews to allow for a deeper understanding of each participant's experience of, and perspective on learning, and focus groups designed to promote discussion and interaction between participants regarding important topics that informed my research. I completed observations in the athletic and academic learning spaces, which provided an invaluable look at interactions and reactions from participants from a distance. In addition, I engaged in the collection of pertinent artifacts on campus to support and cross check the information/data I collected through interviews, focus groups, and observations.

Since members of the DU Men's Basketball team are part of both the athletic and academic learning communities, I did my due diligence as a researcher and collected data from multiple sources in order to fully understand, from a sociocultural perspective, how interactions, perceptions, and engagement occurs within the various learning communities. Collecting data from multiple sources provided invaluable information that will inform best classroom practices and create a more inclusive environment within the diverse athletic and academic learning communities. The chart below is a summation of

how data was collected, the purpose of collecting those types of data, what the data looks like, and how the data was documented.

**Table 2**

How is data collected?	Purpose of data collection?	What does data collection look like?	How will data will documented?
Individual Interviews	To collect descriptions and direct quotes relating to the DU Men's Basketball Teams individual perspective and experience	Interviewer asking a series of questions and documenting, verbatim, the individual experience or perspective relating to each question	Audio recordings will be transcribed, coded, and put into a table
Focus Groups	To observe the interaction between student-athletes and listening to how a similar experience or situation affects student-athlete learning in a very personal and unique way	Interviewer asking questions and documenting body language/interaction as well as documenting the discussion that develops amongst members of the DU Men's Basketball Team in relation to the questions asked	Audio recordings will be transcribed and field notes describing body language, tone, interaction between DU Men's Basketball Team members will be coded. All information will be put into a table
Observation	To observe the DU Men's Basketball Team in their natural athletic and academic setting	Observe the behaviour, without asking questions or interacting with the DU Men's Basketball Team, in both athletic and academic learning spaces	Filed notes will be taken, coded, and recorded in a table
Artifacts	To visually collect data that supports my findings and paints an overall picture of the DU Men's Basketball Team	Collecting schedules, pamphlets, posters, etc. in the athletic and academic learning space on the DU campus	Each artifact will be collected, analyzed, and listed in a table

### ***Individual Interviews***

Interviewing is the most common method of data collection used in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative interviewing assumes “the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Potter (1996) defines interviewing as a “technique of gathering data from humans by asking them questions and getting them to react verbally” (p. 96). The collection of data in qualitative research, through personal accounts of an experience, serves as evidence for what is being researched (Polkinghorne, 2005). The purpose of utilizing qualitative interview inquiry in this case study served to describe the student-athlete experience as I made sense of my research questions. Engaging in qualitative interviews “requires collecting a

series of intense, full, and saturated descriptions of the experience under investigation” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 139).

An interview protocol was developed (see Appendix C) and utilized for the case study face-to-face interviews, with the understanding that (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p. 141):

The structure is sufficiently flexible to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee, to allow responses to be fully probed and explored and to allow the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee.

In order to keep the interview interactive, I asked “an initial question in such a way as to encourage the interviewee to talk freely when answering the question” (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p. 141). Speaking freely about a topic enabled the use of relevant “follow up questions to obtain a deeper and fuller understanding of the participant’s meaning” (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003, p. 141).

Patton (2002) states, “We cannot observe how people have organized the world and meanings they attach to what goes in in the world” (341). Utilizing participant interviews enables the researcher to uncover things that cannot be observed directly (Patton, 2002). By interviewing participants, I was able to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341) and gain an understanding of their personal experience.

Before beginning each interview, I obtained a completed and signed consent form from the study participant (see Appendix B) (Creswell, 2007). I explained the purpose of the study, the time commitment needed to complete the interview, and how I planned to utilize my study findings (Creswell, 2007). In this study, I conducted 10 individual in-

depth, face-to-face interviews on the DU campus with each participant to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions of learning in both the athletic and learning space. I utilized an open-ended question, semi-structured interview guide, allowing for in-depth conversation to naturally occur. The standardized open-ended interview approach "consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (Patton, 2002, p. 342). The standardized open-ended approach minimized variation in responses to the extent that I got an experience/perspective aimed at addressing my interview questions. Patton indicates "This approach requires carefully and fully wording each question before the interview" (Patton, 2002, p. 344) actually takes place. With proper consent, I audio recorded each interview and then had each interview transcribed. After reviewing the transcribed interview data, I determined what potential questions or clarification was necessary in order to gain a full understanding of each participant's interview/perspective. I emailed the transcribed interview to the appropriate study participant for review, allowing the interview participant to review and validate that their responses were within the context of the questions being asked. I then asked each participants a couple of follow-up questions via the phone and/or email. Polkinghorne (2005) indicates the following:

In order to obtain interview data of sufficient quality to produce worthwhile findings, researchers need to engage with participants in more than a one-shot, 1-hr session; they need to attend to establishing a trusting, open relationship with the participant and to focus on the meaning of the participant's life experiences rather than on the accuracy of his or her recall. (p. 142)

I continued engaging with and learning more about my participants through focus group sessions, observations in the athletic and academic learning space, and through the collection of artifacts.

### ***Focus Groups***

Along with individual interviews, this research project utilized focus group interviews (see Appendix D) to collect data. Focus group interviews are a “research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1996, p. 130). I used focus group interviews as a method for collecting data for my project, acknowledging the participants’ group discussion as a source of data, and recognizing the role I play, as the researcher, in eliciting group discussion for collecting useful data (Morgan, 1996).

Each student-athlete was invited to participate in a focus group interview via email or text at an agreed upon time and place that was convenient for them. The first focus group had four participants while the second focus group had five participants. One student-athlete that participated in an interview was unable to attend either focus group. All participants had previously signed the informed consent form (see Appendix B) during their interview to be audio recorded. The focus group sessions were transcribed in order to accurately document the discussion. During the focus group, I asked a series of questions, similar to and building upon those I asked in each individual interview. These questions provoked interactive discussion among the group of student-athletes and provided valuable information/data for my research project.

Observing the interaction between student-athletes and listening to how a similar experience or situation affected student-athlete learning in a very personal and unique way was very informative. Listening to their teammates' differing perceptions and feelings towards situations/experiences invoked discussion that was not drawn out in the one-on-one interviews. Once the two focus groups were completed, I had them transcribed. Once I received the transcribed data back, I began analyzing the focus group data.

### ***Observation***

Along with interviews and focus groups, I observed the study participants in their natural athletic and academic environment. Merriam (2009) states that "Observations differ from interviews in that the researcher obtains a first-hand account of the phenomenon of interest rather than relying on someone else's interpretation" (p. x). As a researcher, I observed the behavior of the DU Men's Basketball Team in both the athletic and academic spaces/environments and documented what was occurring (Potter, 1996). I examined the interactions between the student-athletes and their coaches/teammates in the athletic setting and with their instructors/classmates in the academic setting. Potter (1996) explains that "Observation is the technique of gathering data through direct contact with an object—usually another human being" (p. 98).

To understand how personal interactions within specific spaces affect student-athlete learning, it is advantageous to have "direct, personal contact with and observations..." (Patton, 2002, p. 262) of student-athlete in their natural setting. First, direct observation gave me an opportunity to better understand and capture the

environment and context by which student-athletes interact (Patton, 2002).

Understanding this “context is essential to [gathering] a holistic perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 262). Second, with interviewing I gained an understanding of past experiences/perspectives of the student-athletes, but with first-hand observation of student-athletes in a specific setting, I could “be open, discovery-oriented, and inductive because, by being on-site, the observer has less need to rely on prior conceptualization of the setting...” (Patton, 2002, p. 262). A third strength of utilizing observation in this case study was the “opportunity to see things that may routinely escape awareness of the people in the setting” (Patton, 2002, p. 262). With observation, I captured a perspective of the interaction within each space that student-athletes might lack awareness of or do not consciously think to talk about in an interview setting.

### ***Artifacts***

Data collection in a case study is “typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, documents and audiovisual materials” (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). Collecting artifacts/documents relating to student-athlete surroundings, schedules, facilities, etc., will support my data findings and help paint an overall picture of what affects student-athlete learning in both the athletic and academic learning spaces in higher education.

In collecting artifacts/documents, I collected practice and game schedules, along with student-athlete class schedules. I looked at visual images in the athletic and academic learning spaces, team pamphlets, and other documents that might potentially

support my project. All of the artifacts collected assisted in my understanding of the student-athlete learning experience.

## **Data Analysis**

Creswell (2007) indicates the following:

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. (p. 148)

Each source of data collected was thoroughly analyzed during this segment of the case study. I began coding/re-coding my data early in my research, as “ongoing coding uncovers real or potential sources of bias, and surfaces incomplete or equivocal data that can be clarified next time out” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 65). I utilized coding in my data analysis because codes are “efficient data labeling and retrieval devices” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 65). I am using codes to “empower and speed up” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 65) how I understand and make sense of my data.

Miles and Huberman (1994) indicate that it is helpful to create initial codes prior to engaging in fieldwork because it forces the researcher to “tie research questions or conceptual interests directly to the data” (p. 65). Although I created initial codes, I redefined, regrouped, and re-organized the codes to fit the data more appropriately as I conducted my interviews/focus groups/observations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As Creswell states, “The processes of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process—they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project” (p. 150). I was considerate of the terminology used by the study



participants to ensure the codes “relate to or are distinct from others in meaningful, study-important ways” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 65).

Since I conducted interviews, focus groups, and observed the student-athletes in their familiar academic and athletic learning space simultaneously, I listened to my interview/focus group data and/or reviewed my field notes and observational field notes prior to the following interview, focus group, or observation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In doing this, I was able to build off of my previously attained research data and better understand what was emerging and happening within my project. Miles and Huberman (1994) assert that “qualitative research depends heavily on ongoing analysis, and coding is a good device for supporting that analysis” (p. 66).

In analyzing the qualitative data, I looked at the data generated and transformed/coded my data to produce study findings (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) indicates:

The challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal. ( p. 432)

I created a chart of codes for the data this research project generated.

**Table 3**

<b>Code Family</b>	<b>Explanation of Code</b>	<b>Initial Codes</b>
Learning Spaces	Two separate learning spaces (athletic and academic) where research will occur	1. Academic spaces 2. Athletic spaces
Inclusive and/or Diverse Environment	Is the athletic and/or academic environment considered inclusive and/or diverse	1. Inclusive and Diverse 2. Not Inclusive and not Diverse 3. Inclusive not Diverse 4. Not Inclusive and Diverse

Mode of teaching	Is the mode of teaching (pedagogy) effective in athletic and/or athletic environment	1. Effective in Academic 2. Not Effective in Academic 3. Effective in Athletics 4. Not Effective in Athletics
Relationships in Learning Spaces	The different combinations of relationships/interactions that affect learning within the Learning Spaces	1. Student-athlete with coach 2. Student-athlete with teammate 3. Student-athlete with instructor 4. Student-athlete with classmates
Learning Experiences in Learning Spaces	Participants perspective on learning experiences in two (athletic and academic) Learning Spaces	1. Positive experience 2. Negative experience
Self-Perception in Learning Spaces	Participants perception of self in two (athletic and academic) Learning Spaces	1. Positive perception of self in athletic and academic learning space 2. Negative perception of self in athletic and academic learning space
Motivation for Success in Learning Spaces	Participants motivation to be successful in two (athletic and academic) Learning Spaces	1. Motivated to be successful 2. Not motivated to be successful
Supporting Documentation	Artifacts that support research findings	1. Schedules (practice, game, class, etc.) 2. Pictures

## Credibility of Research

### *Trustworthiness/Validity/Reliability/Credibility*

Patton (2002) indicates:

No straightforward tests can be applied for reliability and validity. In short, no absolute rules exist except perhaps this: do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study. (p. 432)

As a researcher, I strive to represent my data accurately and clearly by engaging in practices/strategies to increase the credibility of my research. After completing each

interview, I listened to the audio recording and wrote down interesting information/data that I wanted to expand upon in future interviews. I personally transcribed a few interviews and utilized a third party to transcribe some of the interviews. I sent the transcribed interviews to the appropriate student-athletes for verification that their perceptions were captured accurately. The goal being by reviewing the interview transcription, the “participants should be able to recognize their experience in your interpretation or suggest some fine-tuning to better capture their perspectives” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). The participants had the opportunity to validate that the interview data I recorded was accurate so I could use it as a reliable source of information regarding their perspective.

Ensuring trustworthiness in a qualitative study can be difficult to attain, but by being transparent and ethical in my interactions with my participants, carefully designing the study, and approaching my research with rigor (Merriam, 2009), I produced trustworthy, credible findings.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In reflecting on my role as the researcher in this project, I began to think about my time as a student-athlete in a higher education institution as well as the time I spent coaching student-athletes. I have played soccer since I was six years old and I was a four-year scholarship student-athlete on the women’s soccer team at Northwestern University. The existing literature presented in this paper reflects a lot of the experiences and memories I have from college, but looking at the athletic space as a learning space and understanding what learning opportunities (existing or uncovered) exist in higher

education to promote successful learning is a new concept/idea. While I was in college, I coached girls ages 6 to 17 at summer soccer camp at several universities across the county, and I have coached a female high school varsity soccer team the past six years. Though I bring biases of both the student-athlete experience and coaching in an educational setting, and have my own ideas of what types of activities and relationships are effective and beneficial to learning, I also recognize the importance of approaching my research from a place of humility.

I was committed to using my knowledge and experience as a student-athlete and coach to challenge the data I collected, the conversations I had with participants, the findings I grappled with, the analysis I worked through, and the findings I presented to the higher education community. Each student-athlete has a unique experience and perception that is valuable to this research project. In my role as the researcher, I gave each piece of information, each conversation, and each participant the same consideration, and thoroughly dissected the data to better understand the meaning behind the data.

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis/Findings**

The purpose of this single-case study was to gain insight and an understanding of how the DU Men's Basketball Team experiences and perceives effective learning in the academic and athletic learning environment. With this research, a better understanding of how learning takes place, what practices are effective, and if each learning environment is perceived as inclusive and diverse, was achieved. I collected four forms of research data. I conducted 10 face-to-face interviews with each member of the DU Men's Basketball Team (freshman through senior), 2 face to face focus groups with 9 members of the DU Men's Basketball Team, 10 observations in the academic and athletic setting, and collected artifacts from the student-athletes, on campus, and online.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this research study and were used to capture/acquire the research data and subsequent reported findings:

1. What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the athletic learning space?
2. What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the academic learning space?

## Answering the Research Questions

The research data revealed that the athletic and academic learning spaces support two separate cultures and knowledges. The style and type of learning that transpires in each learning space is not entirely compatible, but it is imperative that each learning space is understood and mutually respected. There are important teaching/learning techniques that occur within each space that can inform effective learning practices. Student-athletes are expected to actively participate in the two learning spaces that teach and support incompatible learning methods, styles, and techniques; however, each space informs various critical teaching/learning practices that support student-athlete success. I used the data collected to compare and contrast the athletic and academic learning spaces and to highlight how teaching/learning occurs. Ultimately, each space can learn from one another and higher education institutions can begin to focus on and implement teaching/learning practices that support student-athlete learning in both learning spaces. Below is a chart that compares/contrasts the athletic and academic learning space.

**Table 4**

<b>Athletic Learning Environment</b>	<b>Academic Learning Environment</b>
Immediate Feedback	Delayed Feedback
Small group training, film, white board, hands-on	PowerPoint, Lecture, White Board
Electronics not allowed	Electronics allowed
Authoritative teaching style	Democratic teaching style
Limited dialogue	Dialogue welcomed
Multiple coaches teaching	One instructor teaching
Deep relationship/friendship with teammates	Surface level relationship/friendship with classmates
Interact with coaches almost daily (frequently)	Interact with instructor during class or if

<b>Athletic Learning Environment</b>	<b>Academic Learning Environment</b>
	necessary (rarely)
Choose to hang out with teammates outside of athletics	Only interact with classmates in academic environment
Knowledge pertains to specific skills for specific outcomes	Knowledge pertains to specific concepts with unlimited/unknown outcomes (individual thought)
Frequent repetition of concepts	Limited repetition of concepts
Frequent direct interaction between student-athlete and coach	Little direct interaction between student-athlete and instructor
Constant physical movement during practice/games	Little physical movement during class
Attendance required	Attendance not required, but encouraged
Common goal	Individual goals

In order to effectively answer/address my research questions, I will first discuss what the student-athlete participants reported a learning space looks like and feels like to them, along with if they perceive each learning space as an inclusive/diverse learning environment. Each student-athlete is identified by SA1-SA10. In order to comprehend effective learning practices, it is important to understand the space by which each student-athlete considers a learning environment. Though each student-athlete described a learning space as an environment where information is being taught (by different methods) and learned, elements of an effective learning environment varied between student-athletes.

### ***Identifying a Learning Space/Environment***

When I asked SA1 what a learning space looked like, he indicated that a learning space is “In a classroom with a teacher and then students listening to the teacher. Then sports wise it is kind of the same thing. Players listening to the coach and the court is

kind of like the classroom.” SA3 indicated that in a learning space you “Surround yourself with people that are helping you learn, experience in learning, the teacher helping out whenever you need them. The academic learning space is more relaxed, not really tensed up. You are never tired running around and its easier to learn.” SA3 then stated, “But the athletic learning space is kind of tougher because you are always tired and it is hard to think about what your learning space is.” SA8 described a learning space from a broader perspective indicating, “I think any situation or place you are in which learning occurs, whether it’s from your peers, coaches, teachers, parents, whoever else, where you are just observing and learning about different things that are going on, whether it’s in the sports world, the academic classroom, life skills.”

A couple of student-athlete participants discussed a learning environment from an individual perspective. SA4 stated, “When I think about a learning environment just for like individual reading or something I just kind of think like in my room by myself, no noise or anything, just kind of like knock it out without music, no distractions.” In the athletic environment he indicated, “I like working out by myself. I learn different things when I’m working out by myself versus when I’m with my coaches.” SA6 also discussed the learning environment as personal space. He stated, “My main learning environment would be my bed in my room. The athletic learning environment is a very different environment. Its similar in that you have to learn but the way you go about it is very different.”

Though each DU Men’s Basketball player perceives the academic and athletic learning spaces slightly differently, overall, each student-athlete participant agreed that



both the academic and athletic learning spaces are a space where individual and group teaching and learning occurs. Though the research data in this project indicates the culture created in each learning space and how teaching/learning is understood within each space is different, student-athletes perceive each space as an environment where learning occurs. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the differences and incorporate effective learning practices into each space. As I began asking questions regarding each student-athlete participant's personal experience and perception of each space, the effectiveness of the mode of teaching, the method and immediacy by which feedback is administered, and why learning is easier or more effective in one environment over the other, was exposed.

### ***Inclusiveness in Learning Spaces***

In the focus groups and individual interviews with the student-athlete participants, we discussed if each student-athlete participant perceived the academic and athletic learning environment at DU as inclusive and all student-athletes responded that both learning environments felt inclusive and diverse. In the focus groups, the student-athlete participants discussed their perception of what an inclusive environment looks like. One student-athlete indicated, "Where any different race can come together and feel welcome and not feel like uncomfortable to be in." Another student-athlete participant stated, "Everybody has their voice and like you're not going to be judged by what you say." In response to whether the DU learning environment represents an inclusive learning space, one student-athlete participant stated, "I would say for like my smaller classes it's easier to have an inclusive environment than the bigger ones... I think the teachers definitely do

the best they can, but it's harder depending on the size." Another student-athlete indicated, "They [coaching staff] do their best to show equality with all the players." Another student-athlete participant added, "It's like a huge community [athletics] when we come together and like if we have a question about something we'd always ask our teammates because someone on the team might have the answer." Overall, the student-athlete participants all agreed that they perceive the DU academic and athletic learning environment as an inclusive community where they feel comfortable being an active participant.

In the academic environment, responses regarding inclusiveness were related to the small DU class sizes and diverse student-body. The student-athletes indicated that with small classes more students are able to get involved in the conversation and interact within the academic learning space. SA3 stated, "When there is a smaller [academic] space, everyone is pretty much involved." SA6 stated, "I feel like I'm able to integrate myself well in the academic space. I have felt included." SA10 indicated that he has met many people at DU from different backgrounds that are here for reasons other than basketball. He indicated, "It's nice to get to know people who come from different backgrounds." SA8 believes that both the academic and athletic learning spaces are equally inclusive. He stated, "I think at DU we definitely have a very diverse group of students kind of where you walk you are seeing different types of people everywhere." He indicated it was nice because "It gives the school a bigger dynamic and different view on every discussion basically because you have different views on basically every subject." SA8 also stated that he thinks, "Both academically and athletically people get

along and there is no type of exclusion between where you are from or what ethnicity or what race. I don't think that plays a big part here [at DU] at all." When discussing the idea of inclusiveness in the athletic learning space SA2, indicated that the athletic environment "Is a brotherhood and it's all inclusive. If you are on a team you know you are part of a family... In the mix of athletes, we are all friendly to each other and it is pretty good. We speak and stuff like that and it's very inclusive." SA5 agreed with SA2 and stated, "Yeah I think the athletic space is definitely inclusive. It is more inclusive. We pretty much do the majority of the drills and pick up together and we hang out together and go everywhere together, so yeah, I feel like it's pretty inclusive."

In my conversations with the DU Men's Basketball Team regarding inclusiveness in both the academic and athletic learning environment at DU, each student-athlete expressed that he does not feel judged by his instructors, coaches, student peers, or teammates, and appreciates the small class/team size, as well as, the diverse student-body within the academic and athletic learning environment. The student-athlete participants enjoyed being surrounded by and able to interact with a diverse group of people in both learning environments. Though each student-athlete participant stated he perceived each learning environment to be inclusive and diverse, when I asked specific questions (later in the individual interview) regarding comfort level asking questions in the athletic and academic learning environment and for feedback from instructors/coaches and teammates/classmates in each environment, some student-athletes responded with information that is in opposition to their description of each space being an inclusive learning environment.

### ***Individual Value in Learning Spaces***

Most student-athlete participants indicated that they feel valued in both the academic and athletic learning environments, especially when the learning community is small. Several participants alluded to the class sizes at DU as a reason they feel their presence is valued in the academic setting. SA1 stated, “Yeah, definitely here because the classes are so small, so it is easier to connect with the teacher and other students.” SA7 stated that he feels his presence is valued in the academic setting in individual meetings with his professors, but in a huge classroom he didn’t think his presence was as valued. SA10 stated that, “Especially here at DU because the classroom sizes are pretty small, so you have to learn face-to-face with professors and professors are actually teaching. I like that a lot. It’s pretty nice.” In the athletic learning space, each participant perceived his presence was valued as well. SA1 stated, “Coach always tells us how much hard work they went through to recruit us...none of us ever feels left out from scrimmaging and practice.” SA10 stated, “Our team isn’t really that big ether, so the coaches are there all the time, they are always giving us the chance to talk to them individually.”

In analyzing the DU Men’s Basketball Team responses, I found that both the small community size and individual attention/interaction were overarching reasons that the DU Men’s Basketball team felt their presence was valued in both the DU academic and athletic learning environments. With the smaller class sizes and ability to engage more directly with their student peers, teammates, coaches, and instructors, the student-athlete participants reported that more often than not, they perceived that their voice/opinion held value in the academic and athletic learning environment.

### ***Observation of Participants***

Observing the student-athlete participants in both their academic and athletic setting was also beneficial. I personally witnessed the perceptions and experiences the student-athlete participants had openly discussed with me during their interview and/or focus group discussion. Watching how the student-athletes learn in the academic and athletic learning environments enabled me to appreciate their body language, their visible engagement with the instructor/coach, teammates/peers, and information being taught within the learning environment. I began connecting what I was seeing/hearing within the two learning environments with what they communicated in their interview and/or focus group discussion.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

Establishing what a “learning space” means and looks like to the DU Men’s Basketball Team was beneficial as I move towards directly answering my research questions. Recognizing that each learning space involves both teaching and learning and distinguishing the existing values and norms within the athletic and academic culture and how information/knowledge is produced within each learning environment, is important when discussing what influences student-athlete learning in higher education within each learning space. Also, ascertaining that the DU Men’s Basketball Team views both the academic and athletic learning spaces as inclusive and diverse environments enables me to look at my data with an understanding that they perceive that inclusivity exists in both learning environments and does not play a dominant role in how student-athletes view their ability to learn in either space.

Understanding what influences student-athlete learning in different learning spaces in higher education was the primary focus of this research project. Utilizing different data collection methods and spending time observing the student-athlete participants in the field enabled me to collect a rich data set spanning aspects of their holistic experience as NCAA Division I student-athletes. As I set out to answer each research question, I recognized that my role as a researcher was to establish a foundation/relationship with each participant that encouraged open and rich dialogue during interviews and focus group discussions. While my presence was well established during my interviews and focus groups, I merely sat quietly in the corner of the room or to the side of the court during my observations within both the academic and athletic learning environments.

As I began analyzing and coding my data, common themes throughout the interview and focus group data in relation to both the academic and athletic learning environments surfaced. Though the data behind what influenced learning in the academic and athletic learning environments within those themes did not always agree, key concepts emerged that directly addressed my research questions.

### ***Data Driven Themes/Concepts***

To cohesively present my data findings in both the academic and athletic learning environment, I utilized three themes/concepts to organize and provide a clear understanding of my findings regarding what influences student-athlete learning in higher education. The three major themes that emerged include the following: Power Relations - Feedback/Dialogue, Identification - Relationships/Bonds, and Motivation - Motivation to

Learn/Improve. These three categories surfaced in my research data and are influenced by the Learning Sciences literature. The themes are relevant in both the academic and athletic learning spaces and allowed me to present my findings meaningfully.

### **Research Question #1**

*What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the athletic learning space?*

### **Power Relations - Feedback/Dialogue**

The athletic learning environment is a space comprised of student-athletes learning from, listening and responding to what the coaching staff and, at times, their teammates, are teaching. In my observations in the athletic learning environment, I noted that there is not any ongoing dialogue or discussion (as more frequently seen in the academic learning environment) among the student-athletes or between coaches and student-athletes. The coaches typically dictate how and when the learning occurs.

### ***Power Structure***

The student-athlete participants described the athletic learning environment as a community/space where everyone has a place and a defined role. A power structure exists within the community, defining what is and is not acceptable behavior within the learning environment. Moje and Lewis (2012) believe that learning opportunities in spaces or communities of people occur and are shaped by the power relations that exist within that community. The DU Men's Basketball Team indicated that they actively participate and engage with their coaches and teammates in the athletic learning environment, though the

level of power is not equally distributed amongst the different roles. Many of the student-athlete participants reported that they do not feel comfortable asking questions to or feedback from their coaches, and prefer to simply react to their instruction. This contradicts the student-athlete participants earlier response that they felt the athletic environment was an inclusive space, void of judgement. The inconsistent response does not devalue their perception, it implies that depending on how the question around inclusiveness is presented/asked can change how the student-athletes think about and experience inclusiveness within a learning environment. The coaches create and maintain a social order/structure within the athletic learning environment. Based on my observations, individual interviews, and focus group discussions, the power structure created by the coaching staff is purposeful and enables the coaches to teach in a very direct and authoritative manner.

The Learning Sciences literature, specifically from a sociocultural perspective, tells us that understanding the power relations within a discourse community is important in understanding how learning occurs. The social order established within the athletic learning environment is perpetuated and accepted as normal. A distinct distribution of power is evident in the athletic learning environment, and though not all the student-athlete participants particularly liked the teaching style or mode of delivery from their coaches, they thought it produced effective learning opportunities and motivated each student-athlete to be successful.



### ***Observation of Training Sessions***

I observed three small group training sessions in the athletic learning environment with 2-4 student-athletes and 3-4 coaches. In each training session, the coaches provided verbal feedback throughout the sessions and the student-athletes responded non-verbally (most of the time) by changing their technique, their pace, and/or the amount of effort/intensity they exhibited during the drills. The 30 to 45 minute training session was high intensity, lots of movement on the court, and little verbal communication from the student-athletes. If the coaches wanted a response, they directly asked for a response. I did not witness any student-athlete attempt a question or ask for feedback during the training sessions. The coaches would either show the student-athletes how they expected the drill, the movement, the shot to look and the student-athletes would incorporate the feedback they received into the drill. The coaches provided positive feedback when the student-athletes met the expectations. When the coaches felt the effort was not good enough, the tone was direct and constructively critical. It was evident that the coaches set a very high standard during training sessions and expected perfection, intensity, and effort for the entire 30 to 45 minutes. The student-athletes were focused and engaged throughout the entire training session.

In the athletic learning environment, student-athletes are taught a skill, a play, a movement, by the coaching staff, and the student-athletes are not necessarily expected to interpret the knowledge being taught, but rather incorporate/learn the information as it is presented. The athletic learning environment is designed and structured giving coaches an authoritative power within the learning environment. This power gives coaches control

within the learning space to develop athletes' skills in a very specific way with the ultimate goal of winning basketball games.

### ***Value of Voice***

In the student-athlete participant interviews/focus groups each student-athlete voiced his respect for the athletic learning space and their coaches, but they did not all feel as if they had a meaningful voice/opinion in the athletic learning environment. I observed (as described above) the student-athletes lack of verbal communication with the coaches in their small group training sessions in the athletic learning environment. SA1 stated that one theme they have at practice is "don't think, just do," so "there is not a whole lot of discussion, not a lot of stopping to think." SA7 indicated that during practice, the student-athletes are quiet and the coaches tell them what to do on the court. He indicated, "Coach is kind of headstrong so what he says goes." SA8 agreed with the above perception and stated, "At DU sometimes when your coaches are telling you something, you don't have as much of a voice. It just depends on who your coach is and who you are talking to though I think." Other student-athlete participants felt their voice/opinion was valued. SA6 definitely felt that his voice/opinion was valued in the athletic space because if he had something to say he indicated, "The coaches are going to react and listen." SA10 stated that he felt/hoped that his voice/opinion was valued on the court because each individual's opinion helps the team get better.

The coaching staff consisted of four coaches, each playing a slightly different role within the learning environment. The head coach was perceived as the primary authority within the learning environment. His knowledge was respected by the student-athletes

and rarely questioned or challenged. The coaching staff supported the head coaches teaching points within the athletic learning space, but played a bigger role in the student-athletes' lives off the court. Each student-athlete was assigned an assistant coach to discuss academics and/or any other problems/issues they were having. The design of the athletic learning environment, though limiting in producing individual knowledge, was effective in keeping student-athletes engaged and focused in the learning environment, working towards the common goal of winning basketball games.

### ***Judgement in Learning Space***

In the athletic setting, none of the student-athlete participants indicated they felt judged by their teammates, coaches, or other athletes. They felt a sense of community and that everyone supported one another. Though the student-athletes did not all feel as if they could ask questions and engage in discussion with their teammates and coaches during practice in the athletic learning space, based on their tone and body language during the interview/focus group discussion, they did not necessarily view this as negative or uncommon. By design, it was simply how learning took place in the athletic learning environment. The student-athletes indicated they have grown up, learned within, and are accustomed to how learning is taught/received within the athletic learning space. SA6 stated, "I learn better with athletic feedback because it's more individual and direct and not general. It makes more sense to me." SA5 agreed, "If you get feedback right away you know what you did wrong and what you can do to change it."

### ***Teaching Methods***

The mode by which teaching/feedback was administered and instruction was received varied in the academic and athletic learning space. In my observation of the athletic learning environment, the teaching instruction was very hands-on, immediate, and direct. SA1 stated, “Our coaches will work with us on something [in practice] before we incorporate it in a scrimmage.” SA10 indicated, “With immediate feedback you are able to change certain things quickly or more quickly than you would in the academic environment.” While observing the small group training sessions, I witnessed a student-athlete struggling to hit a shot near the free throw line. The head coach verbally and physically showed him how he wanted him to change his technique. The student-athlete was able to immediately make the requested changes and started making his jump shots much more consistently.

### ***Repetition in Learning Space***

SA2 indicated that in practice there is a lot of repetition. In the small group training sessions I observed, each training session incorporated the same warm up and similar drills. Each student-athlete would repeat a drill for approximately 10 minutes, working on the same concept over and over again until the coaching staff seemed happy with the effort and focus. SA4 said, “I am a good visual learner but I’m more of a kinesthetic learner, especially with basketball. For the plays, a play is really complex where everyone is moving for like 30 seconds. If I was integrated like every day and working on it then I could learn a lot better than kind of just like watching.” SA8 was in agreement with SA4 and stated, “It’s a lot more visual kind of showing. I think you need

to give an example and show somebody how to do things so they know how to do it exactly.” SA10 indicated that the coaches give each student-athlete things to work on right away when they get to DU, so they have something to practice and work on immediately.

Aside from learning while in practice, it was revealed that the coaches also teach during games, have one on one meetings with the student-athletes, watch game film, utilize a white board, and have small (2 to 4 players) group training sessions in the off season that I was able to observe. Though not all student-athletes thought the harsh tone of instruction was always beneficial, they definitely felt they learned effectively with how the feedback was administered in the athletic learning environment. Each member of the DU Men’s Basketball Team indicated they enjoyed being able to practice what their coaches were teaching them in the moment and could respond and change how they were doing something since they received immediate feedback throughout practice.

### ***Comfort level asking Questions/Feedback from Coaches***

In each individual interview and focus group session I asked each student-athlete participant if he was comfortable raising questions or asking his coaches for feedback and got a mix of responses. SA1 stated, “Not necessarily.” Some coaches he felt more comfortable with than others. SA3 and SA8 both indicated they were not very comfortable asking questions and for feedback from the coaching staff. SA8 said, “Not really to be honest. I don’t ask a lot of questions. I would say our coaches are more hard headed, what [they] say goes.” Both SA7 and SA4 indicated that sometimes they feel comfortable asking questions or requesting feedback. SA4 stated, “I kind of do. It

depends on the coach.” SA7 stated, “Sometimes. Coach is head strong so what he says goes.” A few of the student-athlete participants indicated they were comfortable asking questions and for feedback. SA5 stated, “Yes, absolutely because I just want t to get better and they have the knowledge and can tell me what I’m doing wrong.” SA6 said, “Yeah, I would say so. I try to limit it because it disrupts the flow of an actual workout and slows everything down.”

Several student-athlete participants indicated they are not comfortable asking their coaching staff questions because it disrupts the flow of practice, the coaches direct and immediate feedback lets them know exactly what they need to work on, and asking a question during practice is not always conducive to a constructive answer. In the small group training sessions I observed, the student-athletes were constantly moving and the transition between drills was very fast. The athletic learning environment was not conducive to a question/answer session in the middle of the practice. The coaches were quick to correct the student-athletes and not much dialogue took place.

The student-athlete participants indicated that they have a great amount of respect for their coaching staff and though they do not all have a relaxed and personal relationship with each coach, they all agree their coaches have an abundant amount of experience and knowledge and respect the feedback and direction they are receiving. Though the athletic culture is not always conducive to a conversation or dialogue regarding teaching/learning within the athletic space, the environment produces successful student-athletes that are motivated to learn and improve individually and for the success of the team.

### ***What Learning looks like within Athletic Space***

I spoke with each student-athlete about what learning looks like in the athletic learning environment and if the student-athlete participants felt that they learned from their coaches in each interaction. SA1 stated, “Yeah, definitely. If it’s not learning something specific basketball wise, it’s more learning how much effort to put in or how they stress a lot how to be a man and mature for after basketball.” SA8 agreed and stated “I think so, whether it’s basketball related or life relation or school related.” SA2, SA5, and SA6 all stated that they do not necessarily learn something new every practice or interaction in the athletic learning environment, but they are getting better through repetition of a concept during practice. SA2 stated, “Maybe not necessarily something new but again it’s just like repetition and they teach you through this repetition.” SA6 stated, “Yes and no. On the court aspect it is repetition of the same things. I’ve heard it before but this particular part I haven’t mastered so the things they are telling me I’ve heard before I’m just trying to master it.”

Overall, each student-athlete participant indicated he learned from the coaches in the athletic learning environment. Repetition of a concept surfaced as one element of learning that is effective in teaching and learning a skill in the athletic learning environment. While observing the student-athletes in the athletic learning environment, it was evident that repetition of a skill is a teaching method used throughout each training session and based on the immediate and positive results I witnessed, it was an effective method of teaching/learning.

Several student-athlete participants indicated learning is more effective in the athletic learning environment than in the academic learning environment because the feedback is very immediate, direct, and the student-athlete was able to work on the skill (repetition) they were being taught. SA8 stated, “The fact that you know what you did right or wrong at that time and you can make a quick fix instead of waiting a week... that immediate feedback is more effective at least for me.” SA1 stated he definitely thinks learning is more effective in the athletic learning environment. He stated, “When I say definitely it is because of that immediate feedback, that is a big thing.” SA6 shared the same sentiment. He indicated he learned better in the athletic learning environment by stating, “Athletic for sure because the feedback is immediate especially with our coaching staff. They tell you how it is straight up.”

Receiving direct and immediate feedback in the athletic setting was a teaching/learning technique that each student-athlete participant indicated was effective and appreciated. Understanding what the student-athlete participant was doing wrong and being able to work on fixing the identified problem immediately was beneficial in the learning process and something the student-athlete participants all stated they valued. The student-athlete participants indicated they respect their coaches and though the coaching staff exhibits a level of authority or power over the student-athletes in the athletic learning environment/community, the student athletes felt that it produced effective learning within the basketball community.



## **Identification - Relationships/Bonds**

The Learning Sciences literature supports the idea that each student-athlete enters the athletic learning environment with a pre-conceived notion or perception of what the athletic learning space/community looks like based on past experiences. The athletic learning space at DU was described by the student-athlete participants as different than the athletic communities they were each part of in the past, but the student-athletes stated that they adjusted to the athletic learning community created at DU. Each student-athlete indicated they learned effectively in the athletic learning environment and the upper classmen explained that over their four to five years as a student-athlete they developed a respect for their coaches and the athletic learning environment. From a sociocultural perspective regarding learning spaces, Rogers and Fuller (2012) explain that in order to design an effective learning space/community, the instructor (coach) must understand the background and history of each person (student-athlete), and design the learning space to accommodate the (student-athlete's) differences. Based on the sociocultural understanding/perception of learning spaces and my research, over time, the coaches and student-athletes develop a stronger connection and mutual understanding of their personal background/history. This development enables the coaches to create a learning environment/space that is conducive to learning for each student-athlete, as well as, the student-athletes an opportunity to recognize that their current learning environment, though different than it was in their past, is effective in producing a positive learning environment/community.

### ***Interaction with Coaches***

The DU Men's Basketball Team all indicated that they interact with their coaching staff more frequently than with their instructors. They have practice/meetings every weekday during season and frequently have a game on the weekend. Out of season, each student-athlete participant stated they see their coaches 3 to 5 days a week, depending on whether they have individual meetings or small group training sessions. The athletic learning space is designed to enable the coaching staff to have constant and consistent interaction with the student-athletes, allowing the coaches to develop a close, trusting relationship with the student-athletes. By designing a learning space and creating a culture that student-athletes want to be part of, the coaches maintain a sense of control over the knowledge being exchanged in the space and continue to be very influential in the student-athletes' lives.

Each student-athlete participant expressed that they respected their coaches, and most of their interactions involved discussions solely around basketball or academics, not personal issues. SA1 stated, "It's not really a personal one, it's more formal and professional." SA3 stated they have a "love and hate relationship" He said, "Off the court it's love, on the court it's constructive criticism showing you what you need to do better and stuff." SA4 indicated he has a different relationship with each coach. Some of the coaches he can goof off with while other coaches are more serious and stern. SA5 indicated he has built a good relationship with his coaches and noted, "They are definitely father figures." SA6 stated, "He [head coach] looks for the good in me and wants to see the good in me and that's why he tries to push me in the right direction. Over

the past year we have butted heads.” SA8 described his relationship with the coaches as an up and down journey stating, “I am sure it’s not smooth sailing with any athlete or coach for four years.” SA10 indicated he has developed a good relationship with the coaching staff and said, “He [head coach] is a pretty open person. He won’t lie to you, he always tells you the truth. But the truth is supported, so I feel like I can talk to him pretty much about anything.” I found when looking at the student-athlete responses that the upper classmen felt that over the years, they developed a stronger, more open relationship with their coaches and recognized that criticism was in place to make them better basketball players and men. From the student-athlete responses, it does not seem as if the relationship they have with their coaches plays a strong role in how effective they perceive the learning environment.

### ***Relationship with Teammates***

The student-athlete participants spoke very highly of their relationship with their teammates on and off the court. Each member of the DU Men’s Basketball Team indicated they hang out with and learn from their teammates every day, whether they are practicing/playing on the court, or hanging out outside of basketball. In our discussion, SA2 indicated, “I definitely do. There are social aspects like how it is basically to live with other guys, other people, other human beings, and how to interact with them on a daily basis. People come from different backgrounds so I definitely learn a lot of stuff from them [teammates] even though I might not be able to say here right now.” SA3 stated he learns from his teammates, on and off the court, each day. He stated, “I feel like I learn from teammates every day when we are playing out there as a team. We always

tell each other if we did something wrong. The upper classmen teaching us are wonderful, how to handle yourself around campus and stuff.” SA5 indicated that each player on the team comes from a different background and has something unique to offer. He said, “They always teach me and I’m good at things they aren’t and they are good at things I’m not so this helps me. It’s just having that bond working towards a common goal.” During our discussion, SA7 remarked that he learns most from watching his teammates set an example. He said, “Yeah, watching the older guys the past 2-3 years, the way they shuffle their feet and use their hands on defense. I watch the little things like that. More of setting an example than verbal feedback.” SA8 indicated that it is really important to build a cohesive team environment that values the opinions of every person. He stated, “I think when you can learn from your teammates sometimes when your coaches aren’t here your teammates are the guys that kind of keep you up and that’s what you want to hear.” SA10 described his teammates as “a band of brothers.” He indicated, “We are pretty close and you know if one of us makes a mistake we all try not to make that same mistake later.” Having a strong team bond and being able to learn from their teammates by watching them during practice/games was identified as an important way the student-athlete participants learn in the athletic learning environment. The relationship they develop with their teammates definitely has an influence on how comfortable and effective they perceive the learning space.

The relationship the student-athlete participants described as having with each other is that of a family, of a brotherhood, of best friends. They respect one another, provide honest and constructive feedback, and choose to spend time together outside of

basketball. The relationship they develop over the few year span they practice/play together is unique and allows for an open and respectful learning environment in the athletic learning space. The frequency of interaction student-athletes have with one another makes the development of a close relationship/friendship effortless. The moment you become a member of the athletic learning space, you have a built in “brotherhood” and support system.

An interesting concept that surfaced in my discussions with the student-athlete participants was that in the athletic learning environment, the moment you begin your journey as a student-athlete you are surrounded by other student-athletes ranging in age from freshman through senior. In the athletic learning environment, each student-athlete participant saw the value in having all four-grade levels together for four years. The upper classmen are able to mentor the under classmen and teach them drills, techniques, and assimilate them into the existing culture. They train and learn together for several years, so they felt value in forming a bond and creating a community within their team. Learning was more effective if everyone trained together, played together, and spent time understanding one another. On the other hand, sometimes the upper classmen felt as if having young guys on the team slowed their ability to learn and play effectively because they were constantly having to teach the young guys the drills and plays. SA7 stated, “We run a different offense and it’s hard to learn and the coaches expect the upper classmen to teach the freshman. I feel like I’m going back and not getting better if I’m always telling them what to do.” SA6 indicated, “Age doesn’t matter in your intelligence. Let’s say someone needs to work on their body a lot and need to pick up physical

attributes. It could benefit them if they were on a freshmen team because they could still play and compete and work on body. But some people think it's better to get thrown right in."

### ***Comfort asking Teammates questions/feedback***

Everyone felt comfortable talking to his teammates and asking for/providing them with feedback. I observed a pick-up game without the coaching staff and the student-athletes were very jovial and light-hearted with one another; yet, expected their teammates to give 100% while playing. SA3 stated, "Yeah. Very close. This year our coach emphasized being an individual that is going to make the team better. We are a brotherhood. We hang out a lot." SA4 was in agreement and stated, "Yeah, I definitely say I'm comfortable asking my teammates questions and for feedback." SA5 indicated he has a strong relationship/friendship with his teammates. He stated, "Absolutely, I know they would help me in a heartbeat just like if they needed me I would gladly help." SA6 made a distinction between his comfort level asking his teammates questions and questions in the classroom. He said, "I don't think I've asked any questions at all [in class]. I prefer to ask my teammates because one of my teammates have taken the class. If the classroom setting were smaller, yes, I would for sure." In conversation, SA8 spoke about the relationship and comfort level he has with his teammates. He stated, "We have never had locker room issues. We always have a very tight knit group of guys that love hanging out with each other, love being around each other. I think that helps you going forward on the court, off the court, teaching others and listening. Respecting each other is one of the big things." The respect and comfort level they have with one another was

evident while watching the pick-up game. The tone was less stern and harsh than the individual training sessions I observed, but the effort and individual expectation to work hard was still evident.

Overall in my discussions with each student-athlete participant regarding his relationship with his teammates, there was an overarching sense that their friendship and bond is what keeps them positive and moving forward towards a common goal. They are each other's biggest supporters on and off the court, either verbally or by setting an example. They motivate one another to learn each day and be the best student-athlete they can be. They are all working towards accomplishing a common goal, winning basketball games. By designing a learning environment that by default creates a space where everyone is motivated to reach a common end goal, the student-athletes are driven to be successful individually. I observed the student-athletes in the strength and conditioning facility on two occasions and the sense of camaraderie, friendship, and support for one another was overwhelmingly positive. The student-athletes encouraged one another, giving high fives, and working together to perfect their technique and become stronger athletes.

### **Motivation - Motivation to Learn/Improve**

Each student-athlete participant indicated he receives a mix of feedback in the athletic learning environment via verbal communication, film, and individual meetings. The feedback is typically straightforward, truthful, and at times given with a harsh/critical tone. SA1 stated, "In practice they will say good job, good shot, way to move" but at other times they will tell you "You can do better." SA4 indicated he receives a lot of

feedback on the court. He stated, “[Coach] likes to have us get out on the court and kind of like work on our mistakes and stuff there. And then we also have like team meetings in our locker room and just kind of talk about academics, basketball, and then like the plans for everything going forward.” SA5 said the coaches’ feedback is very straightforward. He said, “They tell you the truth all the time. You might not want to hear it but it’s beneficial. Just being told straightforward what you need to work on and change I think that’s the best way to do it.” SA6 indicated that the coaches provide a lot of verbal feedback on the court. He stated, “I enjoy having a coach yell because it shows they are interested in your career and trying to improve you.” SA10 stated, “They [the coaches] are going to tell you your weaknesses so you can build your strengths.”

While observing the student-athletes in the athletic learning environment, the tone or way in which feedback was administered did not seem to change the outcome. Whether the feedback was positive or constructive criticism, the student-athletes exhibited motivation and effort to correct their mistake/technique and perfect their skills on the court. The athletic learning environment is set up so constant, direct, immediate feedback can be given. Student-athletes playing Division I athletics have grown up learning in the athletic environment/culture and develop a pre-disposition to receiving positive/negative feedback from their coaches and incorporating it immediately, as instructed.

### ***Athletic Identity***

In the athletic learning environment, the student-athletes exhibit confidence in their athletic ability and when presented with feedback within that space/community, are



motivated to improve and be successful. Many of the student-athlete participants indicated that they define themselves by their athletic participation and feel that they belong to the athletic community. The sociocultural perspective of learning helps to explain and support the findings in this research that suggests student-athletes are successful in the athletic learning environment, in part because they identify as an athlete within the athletic learning community and display confidence in their ability to learn and be successful. Wenger (2000) suggests that when personal social competence and experience exist within a community, learning can occur more rapidly. Through observations, personal interviews, and focus group discussions, the findings in this research are supported by the sociocultural perspective of learning within communities. Though the student-athlete participants all bring a unique personal experience/history of basketball and athletics into the DU basketball learning space, each student-athlete understands the norms of the basketball/athletic community and share a common interest and understanding of that community/space. Having a shared understanding of the athletic learning environment, along with each student-athlete feeling competent in their ability to exist and perform within the athletic learning environment, can be understood by the sociocultural perspective of learning within communities and helps explain why student-athletes experience successful learning in the athletic learning space/community.

### ***Receiving Critical Feedback***

When a coach provides negative feedback or when a critical tone is used, most of the student-athlete participants indicated they stay focused and use the criticism to improve. SA1 indicated he stays positive when he receives a negative comment from the

coaches and stated, “After the negativity I will positively reinforce myself. Personally I ask how can I make this a positive.” SA4 said, “It motivates me to do better.” SA6 stated, “The critical tone doesn’t affect me at all. It’s just the ways he [coach] speaks. If he yells “get your hand up” in a certain way, I just hear “get your hand up” and not the extra stuff that comes with it.” SA8 indicated he is confident in his abilities and stated, “I don’t think it [negative feedback] would hurt my confidence. I just try to move forward. Not that I don’t listen to him but I try to just kind of take it, but you can’t take it negative.” When discussing negative feedback, each student-athlete participant alluded to critical criticism or yelling as a motivational tool to get better. A few of the student-athlete participants indicated when they leave a practice feeling as if the coach is upset with them, they will put extra time in on their own on the court or in the strength and conditioning facility trying to improve the skill(s) that they need to work on.

### ***Teammate Support Structure***

Through discussions with and observations of the DU Men’s Basketball Team, it is evident they are a very close group and have a good relationship on and off the court. They support one another and are working towards a common goal each day. SA1 stated, “We have good examples to live up to. The upperclassmen are really welcoming and really like we became friends. They would always be positive with us, always say “good try, you will be there next time.” SA3 indicated his teammates make him feel confident in his abilities. He stated, “I usually walk off confident. They [teammates] don’t put you down, they are always there to help you out.” SA4 stated that sometimes his teammates can be negative, but there is always someone positive to pick you up. He stated, “Some of

them [teammates] are really positive and some of them are kind of negative. But like the positive people, they really make me feel better.” SA7 stated, “They [teammates] are positive. They try to push me. We hold each other accountable.” In our discussion, SA10 summed up his relationship with his teammates well by stating, “I think I have had a lot of instances of both. More I guess of the build up kind of things because a lot of them [teammates] will kind of break you down and build you back up but it’s not a complete breaking down. It’s kind of a subtle thing, so they will come back and they will be positive and when you walk away you feel confident and stuff because you know your teammates have your back.”

In the athletic learning environment, it was evident that when the DU Men’s Basketball Team respected those around them providing constructive feedback, when the material they were learning was interesting to them, and when they had a stake in the outcome, they were more motivated to work hard and to continue to learn. The aforementioned are all experienced in the athletic learning environment and create an effective learning space. SA5 stated that in the “athletic environment I am more inclined to make changes because at the end of the day they are paying for school and expecting the most improvement. So giving my best to athletics is what I do.” SA7 also indicated that he is motivated to put more effort into improving in the athletic learning environment. He stated, “Yes, I put more effort into it. The athletic environment is what I want to do. I like it better and I tend to listen better to things I like a lot. I’m more focused. I don’t want to sit down and take notes, I like to be active.” SA1 stated that in

the athletic environment he is “committed to getting things right and committed to learning. I think it helps to learn when you want to learn.”

### **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, what influences learning opportunities in the athletic learning space? Based on my individual interviews, focus group sessions, and observations, there are several key components that influenced effective learning practices within the athletic learning space. Using the Learning Sciences literature and defining/viewing the athletic learning space from a sociocultural perspective provides explanatory power in understanding how the learning space influences successful and effective learning practices. In the athletic learning environment, there is an unequal distribution of power with the coaching staff having authoritative power over the student-athletes, the student-athletes have a strong athletic identity and bring their own perceptions and experiences into the learning community, and student-athletes display confidence and motivation to be successful within the athletic learning environment. From a sociocultural perspective, each of the themes identified (power relations, identification, and motivation) above aid in explaining how and why learning opportunities exist within the athletic learning environment.

### ***Immediate Feedback***

The concept discussed most by the student-athletes was their ability to receive quick, immediate feedback from their coaching staff, and make changes in that moment or training session to perfect their skills. Although their coaches used a harsh, at times critical tone, to provide feedback, this did not hinder their ability to be successful. The

feedback was motivating, informed the student-athletes what they were doing wrong, and gave them an opportunity to make changes immediately, in the moment. This was an effective teaching/learning tool and enabled each student-athlete to learn and perfect their skills in each training session.

### ***Repetition***

Engaging in repetition of a skill, concept, drill, etc., was also an effective method the coaching staff used to teach during training sessions. Encouraging the student-athlete to take the same jump shot over and over again until they were rarely missing a jump shot was effective. The student-athletes indicated they enjoyed the repetition and in my observations, it was evident that the repetition was effective. The small group sessions also allowed for a lot of individual interaction. The small group training sessions were conducive to a few student-athletes working on a single skill or concept until they were performing the skill without many, if any, mistakes.

### ***Dialogue***

Though the dialogue between the student-athletes and between the student-athlete and coaches was minimal during the training sessions I observed, the student-athletes indicated they respected the knowledge and technique they were learning from their coaches and did not necessarily need to ask questions. The coaches were very quick to point out what each student-athlete needed to work on, in the moment, so there was little to no confusion as to what skills each student-athlete needed to work on from the coaches' perspective. Even with a harsh/critical tone, the student-athletes indicated they appreciated the honest and direct feedback because it motivated them to become better

athletes individually and for the team. Though having a dialogue with the coaches was not necessarily important to the student-athlete participants in the athletic learning environment, having a mutual respectful relationship was influential and enabled effective learning on the court.

### ***Relationship with Teammates***

The bond/brotherhood that the student-athletes indicated they had with their teammates created a learning environment that encouraged and inspired each student-athlete to become better basketball players. Having the support and encouragement from their teammates on and off the court motivated each student-athlete to work hard and become better players individually and for the success of the team.

### **Research Question #2**

*What influences student-athlete learning in higher education in the academic learning space?*

### **Power Relations - Feedback/Dialogue**

The academic culture created in the academic learning environment was very different than the one observed in the athletic setting. The academic culture, which influenced students' autonomous production of knowledge, is in conflict with the expectations created in the athletic learning environment. The academic environment/space was comprised of a group of students and one instructor, who stood at the front of the classroom while teaching. The participation and engagement between the students and students with their instructor within the academic learning community

produced a different type of learning environment and learning space than the student-athletes described and which I observed in the athletic learning space. Moje and Lewis (2012) describe learning as a “social process” bound within the confines of a community, with a distinct power structure built in to that specific learning space. Though it was evident in my data collection that the instructor was the primary teacher of knowledge, the teaching approach was much less direct than the athletic learning space and very laid back. The instructors did not enforce strict rules and the students could choose whether or not they wanted to be actively engaged and focused in the academic learning space and with the learning material. The power structure within the academic learning environment influenced how learning took place within that community of students and instructor.

### ***Observation of Academic Learning Space***

While observing the academic learning space, it was evident that the focus, intensity, and type of instruction was very different than observed in the athletic learning environment. During my observations, students (not necessarily my participants) arrived to class late, left in the middle of class, were surfing the internet on their computers, texting on their phones, etc. The instructor had his/her back to the class while writing on the white board for a large portion of the classes I observed, and there was not a lot of interaction between the students or the students and instructors. The academic learning environment is designed to give students the freedom to engage and think about the information being taught with little force. Students must be self-motivated and willing to actively participate in the discussion or engage with the learning material without being

told to do so. The academic learning space is designed to allow for individual thought in the production of knowledge.

### ***Value in Voice/Opinion***

In the academic learning environment, most student-athlete participants indicated in the individual interview and focus group discussion that they work hard, their teachers and peers are respectful of their opinions, and the small class sizes allow everyone an opportunity to voice their opinion, though participation is not forced or required in most classes. SA3 stated that he feels like “People around me treat me as if my voice and opinion matters when I do speak up in class.” SA8 also agreed, “All the teachers are very open and they welcome participation. I think that’s nice with DU class sizes too, you don’t have big lecture halls where it’s 500 students and you just sit and listen to the teacher talk for two hours.” SA4 was in agreement with that statement, and indicated he perceives his opinion/voice to be less valued as the group size gets bigger. SA6 shared the same feelings regarding his opinion/voice becoming less valuable as the class sizes increased.

In the academic learning environment, the DU Men’s Basketball Team all felt that the instructors and most of their peers were open to listening to their opinions and ideas in the academic learning environment when the class size was small and more conducive to increased discussion and student to student or student to instructor interaction. There was not a lot of direct interaction with individual student’s, and participation and engagement in classroom learning was not mandated. Though the student-athlete participants felt like the academic learning environment was open to students asking



questions and/or instructors providing feedback, the student-athlete participants indicated they rarely ask questions or engage in conversation. In the academic learning environment, students are encouraged and expected to think about what they are learning and discuss their own personal thoughts. Student-athletes are not accustomed to this type of learning (in the athletic learning space) and might not understand how to think and engage with learning material in the academic learning space.

### ***Teaching Methods***

In the academic learning environment the student-athletes indicated that their instructors teach by utilizing lecture, PowerPoint, white board, online learning and, every now and then, small group or partner discussion in class. I asked how effective these teaching techniques were. SA1 indicated he liked the small group discussion and doing activities in class, but that type of teaching wasn't incorporated very often. SA1 stated, "I'm not really a fan of the lectures, but I mean I feel like he has to do that because of the large class. We can't really do a lot of group work or anything like that." SA4 said, "Some teachers go really fast and it's kind of difficult for me to keep up and then they are kind of boring with their tone of voice and they don't really make the learning fun for me." He said, "Other teachers who are really enthusiastic and engage me very well and then they don't just lecture for two hours and then take notes for two hours. They do different activities with small groups. I think that's really helpful." SA8 indicated, "I am more of a visual learner, so the more hands on and drawing and writing stuff, stuff like that helps me a lot rather than going through a slideshow on PowerPoint and giving a lesson."

Overall, most of the DU Men's Basketball felt that the mode of teaching in the academic learning environment was effective when the class sizes were small and the teaching method was engaging and suited their individual wants/needs. What I observed and gathered from the individual interviews and focus group discussions was that frequently the classroom-learning environment was not an interactive, engaging environment so the student-athletes' motivation to stay involved was relatively low. Staying engaged and participating in the academic environment was viewed by the student-athlete participants as optional, while participation in the athletic learning environment was a requirement built into the learning environment. The academic learning environment was not perceived by the student-athlete participants to be structured to enforce active participation and intense focus with the learning material.

#### ***Comfort asking Classmates Questions/Feedback***

Though not every student-athlete participant felt as if they learned something from their classmates, everyone responded that they felt comfortable asking questions and for feedback. None of the student-athlete participants indicated he received negative feedback from his classmates and no one was scared or hesitant to ask questions to classmates. SA1 stated, "Yeah which is weird. I thought it would be more uncomfortable." SA2, SA3, and SA4 all indicated that though they don't ask their classmates questions often, they definitely feel comfortable doing so. SA5 said, "Yes, absolutely because I know they might understand something better than I might. Asking a classmate that might have different understanding and collaborating to figure it out." SA7 indicated that non-student athletes are probably a good resource. He said, "Yeah,

sometimes. There are some smart people and they have a lot of time on their hands to study.”

In reflecting on my interviews, when the student-athlete participant had small classes where discussion and student interaction was high, or when the student-athlete participant had classes with the same students each quarter, they felt they developed a connection and learned something from their classmates which positively influenced effective learning. In my observations, I did not see the student-athlete participants interact with their classmates in the academic learning space. The academic space is not structured or designed for students and instructors to easily interact daily. Aside from needing a passing grade in the class, there is no perceived common goal motivating student-athletes to stay actively engaged with their classmates/instructor or the learning material within the academic learning environment. Also, because the level of interaction was infrequent, the student-athletes did not develop a friendship or close relationship with their classmates or instructors, which influenced their ability to learn in the academic learning environment.

### ***Comfort asking Instructors Questions/Feedback***

Most student-athlete participants felt comfortable talking to and asking their instructors for feedback. SA4 stated, “I feel comfortable first of all asking them questions and I usually just send them like an email and so that is kind of how I usually interact with them.”SA6 stated, “I would feel comfortable if it was an extreme situation. Aside from something extreme, I don’t think I would contact them.” Even though some student-athlete participants don’t contact their instructors often, SA8 said, “I am not a huge

question asker in class. I don't know why, it just never happens. I have to go on my own time and I just feel more comfortable in that environment I guess. But, I think if you have a question they are always open to questions." After my interview and focus group discussion with each student-athlete participant, it was evident that they felt more comfortable asking their instructors for feedback than they did asking their coaching staff. Most of the feedback they are requesting is delayed, in the form of an email or conversation after receiving a grade on a test or quiz. I did not observe any direct interaction between the student-athlete participants and their instructor. They perceived their instructors to be much more open to questions and feedback than their coaching staff, though most of them indicated they rarely asked for help or asked their instructors questions.

### ***Judgement in Academic Environment***

Some student-athletes did indicate they felt judged in the academic environment, but I was surprised to find that it was not because of their status as an athlete. SA1 indicated he sometimes feels judged in the academic learning environment because there are a lot of different groups on campus that hold strong beliefs about different things. He stated, "If I say something that might get on their nerves and I know they're in a certain group, I will make sure not to say it because they would judge me." SA4 responded, "Yes, I definitely do feel judged in the academic space. When I answered a question wrong there were these girls that would kind of just turn around and give me these really nasty looks, so for the rest of class I kind of was a little hesitant to answer questions because I felt like I was being judged and I don't really like that." I asked why he thought

the girls were giving him nasty looks and he responded he felt it was because of his race, not because he was a student-athlete.

Although the student-athlete participants reported they feel the DU academic and athletic environment is inclusive and diverse, there are still some classes the student-athletes felt they had to censor their opinions for fear of being judged or ridiculed. What I find interesting is that none of the student-athlete participants reported feeling judged or stereotyped based on their student-athlete status. The student-athlete participants reported that feeling comfortable in the learning environment did influence one's ability to learn effectively. The classes the student-athlete participants were not comfortable participating in because of various reasons negatively influenced their willingness to participate in the academic learning environment.

None of the student-athlete participant indicated his status as a student-athlete as a reason for feeling judged or discriminated against in the academic learning environment. This finding is contradictory to what literature reports and was surprising to me as a researcher, expecting different results. Though the student-athlete participants did not seem naïve and they understood that non student-athletes and instructors might carry a preconceived notion of them, no one on the DU Men's Basketball Team felt discriminated against or judged based on being an athlete. SA8 did not feel judgment from his student peers or instructors in the academic learning environment, but he stated, "I am sure there is that stereotype out there. People are probably like, they don't go to class at all, they don't know what's really going on. So, sometimes it might seem like you are not there just because." He went on to explain, "Maybe that is how they feel but there

are other athletic things that are going on that are the reasons why you are missing class.” SA10 agreed and said “Well, me personally, I don’t [feel judged] but I know some students probably look at us and say they are athletes so he’s privileged and gets everything. He doesn’t have to do this and I do. I mean it’s not that I’ve personally seen it, but I have been asked questions about what we get. At the same time I’ve never felt judged by other people.” Having student-athlete status in the academic learning environment did not seem to influence how well the student-athlete participants learned in the academic learning environment.

### **Identification - Relationships/Bonds**

The academic learning community is comprised of a diverse group of people all bringing a unique background, experience, and perception of learning with them. From a sociocultural perspective, Rogers and Fuller (2012) explain that each person brings a pre-conceived notion or experience of learning with them into the academic setting. Recognizing each student’s history/background, along with current expectations of the classroom learning space is vital in understanding how to create a learning space that is conducive to effective learning. In the athletic learning space, the athletes discussed the relevance of a common goal amongst the athletes; to be the best athlete they can be individually in order to support a team effort and ultimately win games. In the academic learning space, the student-athletes did not feel as if there was a common goal or connection to the learning material that motivated them to want to be successful in the academic learning environment. The academic learning environment encourages students to create their own goals and own knowledge from the material/information presented in

the learning environment. Student-athletes are accustomed to being told how to utilize the knowledge being taught to meet a desired goal in the athletic space and inevitably struggle to create their own learning and knowledge without direction in the academic learning space. The Learning Sciences literature indicates that designing an effective learning space requires understanding each student's background and experience with education along with their current educational expectations in order to create a learning space suitable for each student. The student-athletes indicated that each quarter is only 10 weeks, not giving the students very much time to develop a deep connection or trusting relationship with other students or the instructor. This makes it difficult for the instructor to design an effective learning space suitable for the diverse student-body within the classroom.

### ***Age Composition of Academic Classroom***

In the academic learning environment, classes do not typically contain freshman through senior students. There are freshman seminar classes. There are core classes that are typically composed of first year students and sophomores. Then, classes taken in line with a student-athlete's major were predominantly juniors and seniors. The student-athlete participants had a range of responses when asked if they thought having a mixed group of students in their classes would be beneficial and help them learn. Many of the student-athlete participants indicated that the classes you take in your first two years are more foundational and just classes you need to get through in order to graduate. They did not see much value in having all four-grade levels in the class. SA5 stated, "I prefer the under classmen [classes] because we are kind of like all around the same age. We are all

kind of like in the most of the classes I am taking that you have to take.” SA5 discussed the relationship you form with your teammates in the athletic learning environment and how that is not necessarily the case in the academic learning environment. He stated, “You don’t form the same type of bond with your classmates as you do with your teammates because you have a class with them here and there and don’t hang out with them much outside of class and group meetings.”

The academic learning space is not structured so that students automatically have the same classes with other students and an instructor for more than one quarter. There is no consistency in who each student is learning with on a day to day basis. Since there is no consistency in who the student-athletes learn with in the academic setting, building a relationship with a student you might never see again did not seem beneficial to the student-athlete participants.

### ***Learn from Classmates***

The student-athlete participants indicated that sometimes they learn from their classmates, but not in the same way or same intensity that they learn from their teammates. SA4 stated, “It depends on like the size of the class because like in Econ, actually no in the larger classes there is not a lot of one-on-one interaction between students so there isn’t a lot of direct learning.” SA4 did indicate “[Classmates] will ask questions sometimes that I have that I was thinking about it and so that will kind of help clear things up.” Though he did not learn from having a conversation with his classmates, being in the classroom learning environment where a classmate asked a question he had was beneficial. SA4 stated, “I would say so. Learning might not be about class in



particular. But I learn from their experiences since theirs [classmates] are a lot different than mine.” On the other end of the spectrum, SA5 does not feel a connection to his classmates at all. He said, “I would say no. I wouldn’t say I learn from them, I just cooperate with them.” SA6 indicated that depending on the situation, he might learn from his classmates. He said, “Yeah, maybe on quiz days I’ll ask a question, but other than that learning from them I don’t really have a friendship with the person that is next to me like my teammates.” SA8 and SA10 both found that they learned from their classmates, but for different reasons. SA8 is in a small finance class with only a few students and they engage and directly interact in each class, so he feels as if he learns from them in that class. SA10 said, “Definitely, I have a lot friends who are in my classes and the thing about engineers is you have the same people in your classes and you tend to meet with them.”

Most of the student-athlete participants found that they learned *something* from their classmates in the academic learning environment, but it was very situational and did not occur frequently or consistently. Having a strong relationship with classmates was not something the student-athlete participants indicated was important or necessary in creating an effective academic learning environment.

### ***Relationship with Instructor***

In my interview and focus group discussions with each student-athlete participant, I asked him to describe his relationship with his instructors. Each student-athlete participant indicated he had a good relationship with his instructors, though he did not interact with them often. SA1 said, “The professors, they don’t care if we make a

mistake. It's more like a comfortable relationship with them than it is with our coaches.”

SA3 indicated, “I like all my teachers, they are pretty nice and they are always there to help you out whenever you need help.” SA5 said as long as he is showing he cares he has a good relationship with his instructors. He said, “Pretty good usually. Contributing in class and showing them I care and have done the homework.” SA7 stated that his instructors are usually willing to help him with questions. He indicated, “It's pretty good. They sit down with me if I have a question. Even if it's rudimentary they will go step by step and help me.” The student-athlete participants also indicated that they don't interact with their instructors as much as they do with their coaches. SA3 stated, “I don't interact often unless I have a questions about the material. Usually face to face. Not really able to make office hours.” SA4 indicated he interacts with his instructors mostly in the classroom. He said, “Every now and then I'll set up a meeting to talk about school but mostly in the classroom. A lot less than my coaches. Usually office hours I can't do.” SA6 stated he typically emails the instructor talks to him/her after class.

Overall, the DU Men's Basketball Team indicated they have a good, though minimal, relationship with their instructors. They all indicated that they are rarely, if ever, able to attend an instructor's office hours because they typically fall during practice. They all appreciate being able to communicate privately (not in the classroom setting) with their instructors and felt their ability to communicate with their instructors was important since they frequently missed class during season. The student-athlete participants did indicate that being comfortable having a conversation with their instructors was beneficial in being able to make up work and be successful students in the academic

learning environment. I perceive the relationship student-athletes have with their instructor and coach to be very different. Coaches are very involved in the student-athletes learning and have interest in the overall success of the student-athlete. A coach is held accountable for the success of his athletic team so creating successful student-athletes individually and as a team is immanent. Whereas an instructor has a new set of students every quarter and will teach the same class, regardless of how well an individual student-athlete performs in his/her class.

### **Motivation - Motivation to Learn/Improve**

The idea that motivation plays a role in one's desire to learn and improve in a learning environment was an interesting concept that surfaced in the interview and focus group discussions with the student-athlete participants. I asked if each student-athlete participant felt as if he learned something from his instructors in the academic learning environment. SA1 indicated, "When we do go over a new topic, yeah I definitely learn something, but maybe not every day." SA4 stated, "Yeah, I definitely learn something from them whenever I interact with them. SA6 stated that in 75% of his classes he feel like he learns something from his instructor. He stated, "One class is slow so I end up self-teaching." SA7 indicated, "Sometimes the information I learn is not helping me become what I want to be. I get tired and annoyed. If I like the information I'll stay with it." Several student-athlete participants indicated that when the information or subject matter was interesting or directly related to their major, they were more motivated and inclined to learn and improve. My perception of the term "interest" as stated by each student-athlete was anything the student-athlete perceived as beneficial to their athletic

career or something they could foresee helping them towards successful graduation. SA8 stated that he believes it is partially the student's responsibility to learn and be engaged in the classroom. SA10 stated, "Definitely, if it's something I learned new or like something that I knew already but I didn't know a certain part of it. I learn a lot, especially from the professors."

### ***Engagement in Academic Learning Space***

The Learning Sciences literature states that being socially competent and confident within a learning space/community influences a student's ability to learn and produce related, useable knowledge. Though the student-athletes reported they feel comfortable participating in the academic learning environment, their inability to fully or actively engage and connect with the learning material being taught affected their perception and experience with learning. They reported that ultimately they do not learn as well in the academic learning space, which can be partially explained by the lack of connection with the learning material and social community.

### ***Feedback***

Receiving feedback is one way the student-athlete participants indicated they learn what they are doing well and what they need to work on in the academic learning environment. Depending on the student-athlete participant's interest in the class and material he was learning, as well as the speed at which he received feedback, directly affected his motivation to research the answer to a missed question. SA1 and SA2 indicated they typically get feedback on tests and quizzes. He said, "Yeah, it's not like immediate feedback like with the coaches." He stated getting the tests back are helpful,

but sometimes it takes a while and he does not care to understand what he missed. SA5 stated that he receives feedback on tests and quizzes and the feedback he receives is always presented in a positive manner. He stated, “They are never like degrading in the way they talk to me or anything.” SA5 had great things to say about the feedback he receives, though it is not immediate. He stated, “They are all positive comments on papers or tests. I’ve had teachers in the past write a page telling me what to focus on for the final or to focus on theories or something. They are always willing to give feedback. Sometimes you have to ask for it and it isn’t right away.” When discussing his interest in looking up answers to missed questions on tests/quizzes, SA 8 indicated, “You obviously want to learn more about what you are interested in instead of maybe a class you are just required to take. So I don’t know, if I got something wrong there, I was like okay, I just have to get through this class and I will be fine because it wasn’t something that I could see myself doing down the line. I think that does have an effect if you are more interested in something you want to go and learn more about it.” SA1 had a similar response. He stated, “But if I get something wrong and I’m not interested [academically], I don’t want to go and look up what the answer is.”

Throughout a student-athlete’s athletic career, they are given direct and immediate feedback from their coach. A student-athlete comes to expect very focused and directed feedback with little room for interpretation. In the academic learning environment, an instructor expects a student-athlete to grapple with tough ideas/information and ask questions based on their own understanding of a concept or idea. I do not think it can be assumed that a student-athlete knows how to properly or

effectively create their own knowledge without direction. The academic learning environment is not structured to direct learning in a specific way, rather, it is designed to encourage autonomous thinking.

### ***Interest in Learning Material***

It was evident in several interviews and the focus group discussions that having interest in the learning material and receiving immediate feedback was a significant motivator for the student-athlete participants to learn the material. SA10 indicated that one of his classes used clickers. The instructor would put a question on the overhead projector and the students would select an answer by using a clicker. The correct answer was then revealed immediately. He indicated this was a very effective way to receive feedback in the academic learning environment. In the athletic environment, most of the feedback is given immediately, in the moment, during a practice/game. This gives the student-athletes the opportunity to make changes right away, in the moment. Most of the feedback received in the academic learning environment is delayed. Feedback is given on a test, quiz, or paper a week or more later. With delayed feedback, the student-athlete participants indicated they are not as motivated to understand the concept or problem they missed. Unless they are personally interested in the answer or it is a concept they are required to understand for the next test, they are not motivated to learn the material. From conversations with the student-athlete participants, it is almost impossible to not be engaged in the athletic learning environment because everyone is participating and the coach is directly teaching/coaching the student-athletes.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, what influences learning opportunities in the academic learning space? Based on my individual interviews, focus group sessions, and observations, there are several key components that influenced effective learning practices, though the student-athlete participants indicated they learn better in the athletic learning environment. The Learning Sciences literature, from a sociocultural perspective, highlights that understanding the power relations/authority within a learning community, designing a community of learning while being cognizant of how each student identifies within that community, and creating a community where students display confidence within the community, are all important in creating an effective learning space.

### ***Engage/Participate***

In the academic learning space, though the instructor is the primary teacher of knowledge, the instructor does not frequently use this power in an authoritative, direct, and critical manner. Since participation and engagement is not forced in the academic learning environment, the student-athletes indicated they are less likely to get involved and pro-actively learn. Also, student-athletes stated they might have a teacher or student peer one quarter out of their entire four year span as a student-athlete. They do not have the time or desire to develop and nurture a relationship with members of the academic learning environment like they do in the athletic learning environment. All of the aforementioned factors affect a student-athletes ability to actively engage and learn effectively in the academic learning space.

### ***Small Class Size***

Each student-athlete participant agreed that the small class sizes at DU influenced their ability to learn more effectively in the classroom learning space. The smaller class sizes enabled more questions to be asked by the students and answered by the instructors within the classroom setting. Some student-athlete participants indicated that questions were answered within the classroom setting; however, the instructor was not always good at ensuring all the students were actively participating in the learning environment. The instructors interacted with the same three or four students in class, asking questions and receiving answers. I witnessed this occurring in two of the classes I observed. Throughout the class, it was evident what students actively participated and were called upon to answer questions. The instructor did not require students to actively participate, so the same students continued to ask and answer questions. In the athletic learning environment, everyone actively participates in each drill. It is not optional, it is expected/required.

### ***Feedback***

Each student-athlete participant indicated that the feedback he receives in the academic learning environment is not always effective, primarily because it is so delayed. If instructors provided more immediate feedback during classroom discussions and incorporated more interactive methods of teaching, the student-athletes suggested their motivation and ability to stay engaged with the learning material would increase. With that said, the student-athlete participants also indicated that the more interested they were in the material being taught, the more likely they were to actively stay engaged and learn



the material. If the material being taught was outside their major or simply uninteresting to them, most student-athlete participants indicated they would learn the material enough to pass, but did not have the motivation or ambition to become more knowledgeable or seek out the answer to a missed question on a quiz or test.

## **Artifacts**

To support of my findings, I collected artifacts on campus, online, and from the student-athlete participants. I observed in the student-athlete academic services department and though there were not many student-athletes utilizing the learning space during the middle of the day, there was a computer lab and individual study rooms that student-athletes were able to utilize. I collected literature that was available in the academic services learning space. The available literature (Appendix E: Academic Resources Literature) is a collection of information to help student-athletes prepare for life in the work force after graduation. Several student-athlete participants indicated that they spend time in academic services scheduling their classes (around practice times) and meeting with their academic advisors for academic advice or information. Since a majority of student-athletes do not play professionally after college, the provided resources are in place to help prepare student athletes for the workforce.

I also collected a syllabus (Appendix F: Student Syllabus) from a student-athlete that identified the instructor's office hours. The instructor's office hours were scheduled during the student-athlete participant's afternoon basketball workout, as many of the student-athlete participants indicated in their individual interviews. I printed last season's DU basketball game (Appendix G: DU Men's Basketball Schedule) schedule from the

DU website and as each student-athlete participant indicated that they had to miss classes during the quarter to travel and/or prepare for games. Though most of their instructors were understanding, it is evident why keeping up with academic work is difficult during season, considering their game schedule requires them to miss class on an almost weekly basis.

The DU Men's Basketball practice and strength and conditioning schedule in the off season is constantly changing. There is no set schedule, but the individual student-athletes do not have basketball commitments during their scheduled class time. Last season, the student-athlete participants indicated they had afternoon practices/strength and conditioning sessions so they were only able to enroll in morning classes. This, at times, affected their ability to take a class required for their major or an elective that was interesting to them. Since my findings indicate that classes related to the student-athlete participants major along with classes that interest the student-athlete motivate them to learn and be more engaged in the academic learning environment, being restricted to morning classes can influence the student-athletes motivation and ability to be successful in the academic learning environment.

### **Summary of Findings**

Understanding what the DU Men's Basketball Team perceives influences learning opportunities in the academic and athletic learning environments can inform how higher education institutions incorporate learning into the academic and athletic learning environment. My research findings support the idea that the athletic and academic learning environments are two separate cultures and two separate knowledges that can

learn from one another. Student-athletes spend more time in the athletic learning space and develop a predisposition to learning from their involvement in the athletic learning environment that affects their ability to learn in the academic learning environment. Being cognizant of how the two cultures differ and how expectations of how the creation of knowledge within these two learning environments takes place can inform the higher education community and begin discussions around how the two learning environments can best support one another.

The learning environment, as viewed from a sociocultural perspective, does influence how successful learning is within different communities or learning environments. The findings suggest that student-athletes find the athletic learning environment more conducive to effective and successful learning. The coaching staff provides very direct, critical, constructive feedback and has designed the learning space to be hierarchical. The coaches are the authority within the community/learning space and the student-athletes listen and learn. This type of learning environment was actually preferred by the student-athletes. Also, having a strong identification in the athletic learning environment and adjusting to the design of the learning environment over the four to five years as a student-athlete enabled effective learning within the athletic learning space, while failing to have a connection to the learning environment or a strong relationship with student peers and instructors impacted/influenced the student-athletes' ability to learn as effectively as they do in the athletic learning environment.

The individual participant interviews, focus group discussions, and researcher's observations provided valuable data concerning the student-athlete participants'

perception and experience in both the academic and athletic learning space. Recognizing what influences a student-athlete's ability to learn effectively in higher education institutions can affect/inform change in how learning environments are designed and learning instruction is administered. This research project identified three main areas that influence how effectively the DU Men's Basketball Team perceives they learn in the academic and athletic learning environment: Power Relations - Feedback/Dialogue, Identification - Relationships/Bonds, and Motivation - Motivation to Learn/Improve. Within these three categories, the DU Men's Basketball Team indicated that immediate feedback within the learning environment, developing a strong friendship/community with those people in the learning environment, and having interest/stake in the learning material, were all key concepts that strongly influenced the student-athlete participants' ability to learn.

### ***Learning more Effective in Athletic Learning Space***

Most student-athlete participants (9/10) felt that they learned more effectively in the athletic learning environment. SA8 summed up their collective perceptiveness well by stating, "I think the athletic because you are forced to be engaged 100% of the time. The feedback is so hands on and direct, right to the point. I mean really the next play you could do the same thing over and over again but since you have that direct feedback you could do it 100 times better and that makes a difference in whether you play or not. If you can take something your coaches say and teach yourself to do it, then they have that confidence in you. That immediate feedback 100% of the time gives me the motivation to stay focused and stay driven all the time while I am in that environment." Though the

student-athlete participants did not like everything about how learning took place in the athletic learning environment, they found the learning space comfortable, familiar, and effective for motivating them to be successful.

From a sociocultural perspective, the participation and engagement of people within a community, and the power structure created within a space, affects learning. My findings support this theoretical notion as the student-athletes found the athletic learning space more effective than the academic learning space. The lack of forced focus and/or structure, inability to move around and actively engage with the learning material within the academic space, and little direct interaction from the instructor, all affected how well the student-athletes perceived and experienced learning. The direct and more distinguished power structure created in the athletic environment was perceived as a more effective teaching/learning environment than the less structured and more relaxed environment created in the academic learning space.

### ***No Judgement Based on Athlete Status***

Based on literature, I thought the student-athlete participants would have indicated that they felt judgement and stereotype in the academic learning environment based on their status as student-athletes. The student-athlete participants did not view their athletic status in the academic or athletic learning environment as hindering their ability to learn. They did not collectively feel judged or stereotyped in either learning environment. Overall, the student-athlete participants felt their presence and voice were valued in both the academic and athletic learning spaces. I was expecting different findings based on literature. Another finding that was not in line with what other research

projects presented in the literature is that student-athletes have less confidence in their academic abilities, especially when identifying as an athlete within that academic learning space. Each student-athlete participant indicated he felt that he could be successful in both the academic and athletic learning environment as long as he put the necessary time and effort into learning.

Since my findings indicate that the student-athlete participants do not feel judged in the academic or athletic learning environment and feel confident in their ability to be successful in both the academic and athletic learning environments (opposite findings of a majority of published literature), the collected data answering my research questions is valuable. It can provide insight regarding what student-athletes perceive and experience as effective learning, teaching tools and methods for instructors/coaches to utilize in the learning space, and information concerning what motivates student-athletes to learn effectively. The higher education community can begin to evaluate what is, is not working, and can incorporate more effective/influential learning practices (based on the student-athletes' perception) within the academic and athletic learning space.

## **Chapter 5: Summary/Conclusions and Future Research**

If all relevant parties in the higher education community are committed to supporting student-athletes in achieving balance and success in their academic and athletic roles, it is possible to assist student-athletes in achieving a meaningful education and a successful life after college (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008). The purpose of this single-case study research project was to understand the perceptions and experiences of the DU Men's Basketball Team in the academic and athletic learning environment in order to gain insight regarding what influences effective learning opportunities/practices in the academic and athletic learning space. Some of the research project findings are supported by literature, while others tell a different story.

Existing literature indicates that the student-athlete population is unique and student-athletes face challenges not necessarily experienced by other students. Literature indicates that student-athletes are an important sub-population in higher education institutions. They enhance the academic mission of higher education institutions by creating an enriched sense of community and by increasing the academic vitality of the university (Holbrook, 2004), as well as, by luring potential top tier students, alumni support, donors, business leaders, and public officials to the university, which can help increase enrollment (Holbrook, 2004; Watt & Moore III, 2001). Student-athletes have a

dual role while in college; they are expected to excel both academically and athletically with a huge time commitment to their athletic learning environment. My findings reinforce the idea that the athletic and academic learning environment support two separate cultures and two separate knowledges.

### **Limitations**

Every research project has limitations. This research project was conducted at a small, private, predominantly white university. The student-athlete participants were members of the DU Men's Basketball Team, a revenue generating sport. The research was conducted in the offseason so full team practices and games were not observed. Since the case study was the DU Men's Basketball Team, no female participants were recruited for this research project. The above factors all make this research project unique and also have an effect on the findings. The findings are not meant to be generalizable to other universities or other sports. The findings are indicative of the perceptions and experiences of the 10 student-athlete participants that engaged in this research project. Though the findings are not generalizable to a larger group, the findings are still meaningful and tell an important story regarding what influences student-athlete learning within the academic and athletic learning environment at DU.

### **Institutional Implications for Practice of Learning**

The findings of this research project are meaningful in a plethora of ways. Higher education institutions play a critical role in student-athlete learning and literature supports that universities have a responsibility or obligation to provide student-athletes with a



meaningful education (Sharp & Sheilley, 2008) by ensuring that effective learning opportunities are available in both the academic and athletic learning environments. The NCAA reports that student-athletes are graduating at rates equal to or higher than the non-student-athletes, but looking at GPAs and graduation rates does not paint a full picture of what effective learning looks like in the academic and athletic learning environment.

In the athletic learning environment, the student-athlete participants indicated they are constantly moving, being spoken to directly, focused while being given instruction, and actively participate with the skills being taught in practice and in games. The student-athletes found this type of learning environment effective. They could not surf the internet on their computer, play on their phones, or show up late to practice. The student-athletes were forced to be present and involved in the teaching/learning space because the athletic learning environment is set up so that everyone actively participates throughout the entire practice, strength and conditioning session, or game. The academic learning environment functions very differently from the athletic learning space, and there were aspects of learning that the student-athletes indicated were effective in the athletic learning environment that could be utilized in the academic learning space. The higher education community can effect change in the academic learning environment by incorporating more immediate feedback during class discussion, incorporating hands on projects/activities between students and with the instructor during class, as well as engage in repetitive learning techniques.

Two separate cultures and two separate knowledges exist within the athletic and academic learning environment. My findings identify several teaching and learning opportunities that exist within each environment, but currently the teaching and learning opportunities are not compatible or operational in both environments. The culture created within the athletic environment supports a direct, authoritative style of learning, where repetition and immediate feedback motivate and encourage student-athletes to learn and be successful. Student-athletes are expected by the coaching staff to incorporate a skill or technique exactly as it is taught. The academic environment is a democratic style of learning where students are required to create and develop their own meaningful relationships with others and with the learning material. Students are expected to be autonomous thinkers and must be self-motivated to learn.

My findings indicate that student-athletes prefer the teaching/learning techniques in the athletic environment. Student-athletes begin learning in the athletic environment at a very young age and the structural and cultural norms within the athletic learning environment remain relatively constant at all levels. So, student-athletes become comfortable and confident with the teaching and learning that occurs within the athletic learning environment and I argue that student-athletes are predisposed to this learning style.

What are the institutional implications? Student-athletes will remain complacent in the academic learning environment and struggle to develop meaningful relationships or actively engage within the academic learning environment. Faculty members, coaches, and student-athlete support personnel must teach student-athletes how to utilize the skills

they have developed within the athletic learning environment to engage in the teaching and learning opportunities presented in the academic learning environment. Student-athletes have the ability to quickly incorporate a technique they have learned into the learning environment, to build successful and meaningful relationships with others, to remain physically and emotionally focused on the learning material, to engage and actively participate in the teaching/learning environment. These techniques are learned and incorporated by student-athletes in the athletic environment daily. Academic and athletic personnel must work together to teach student-athletes how to effectively utilize these skills to their benefit in the academic learning environment. Student-athletes might not recognize they already have the skills necessary to be successful students in the academic learning environment, so proper/designated personnel within the academic and athletic environment must collaborate to teach student-athletes how to incorporate these skills in the academic learning space. Career services can work with student-athletes to identify their academic and future goals and begin teaching them how they can reach these goals by utilizing the skills they've developed throughout their athletic career in the academic learning environment.

The academic culture supports autonomous thought and expects students to grapple with difficult concepts and create new meaningful knowledge. Since student-athletes have a predisposition to how teaching/learning occurs in the athletic learning environment, student-athletes might lack the ability to interpret learning concepts in a meaningful way. In the athletic learning environment student-athletes are told exactly

their positional role in a play, how to play effective defense, and the proper technique when shooting a jump shot. There is little individual interpretation of these skills.

What are the institutional implications of two separate knowledges existing within the athletic and academic learning space? Student-athletes remain less productive in the academic environment because they either are not comfortable or are not able to be autonomous thinkers within the academic learning environment. Higher education institutions must intervene and incorporate new ways/ideas to teach student-athletes how to think and learn differently, undoing some of the learning techniques they are accustomed to. Faculty, coaches, and support personnel must be educated on the importance of ensuring student-athletes are prepared and have the proper skills to be successful in both learning spaces. They must work together to encourage student-athletes to be autonomous thinkers in all learning environments, while adhering to the cultural norms of the individual learning space. Creating a freshman orientation class or workshop for all students that teaches the importance of individual, autonomous thought, taught together by a member of the athletic and academic community, can encourage student-athletes to be autonomous thinkers and teach them how to create meaningful and new knowledge in the athletic and academic learning environment.

Each learning space has aspects of teaching and learning that can inform and teach the other learning space. The members of each learning space must be willing and open to slight modifications/changes within the learning space in order to best support student-athlete learning. What are the institutional implications to disregarding the findings of this research and continuing to operate and teach/learn without making any

changes? Student-athletes will continue to perceive the athletic environment as a more effective learning space. The skills student-athletes have developed by learning and growing within in the athletic learning environment will go unused in the academic learning space. Student-athletes will not fully understand what autonomous thinking to create new knowledge involves, negatively affecting their ability to fully engage and participate in the academic and athletic learning environment. The higher education institution will be doing both the student-athlete and academic/athletic learning environments a disservice by not addressing the findings of this research. By teaching student-athletes how to utilize the skills they already have to be more successful in each learning environment, as well as, teaching them how thinking in new and different ways can enhance learning in both the athletic and academic learning environment, the higher education community will produce more thoughtful and informed student-athletes. Merging the learning opportunities in the academic and athletic environment, and informing/teaching student-athlete support personnel in both the athletic and academic learning spaces to be open to small changes in their environment will create a more inclusive and open learning environment in higher education institutions, as well as more learning opportunities for student-athletes.

### **Practical Recommendations Based on Findings/Implications**

In the academic learning environment, lecture, PowerPoint, and writing examples/notes on the white board were used frequently as a teaching/learning tool but was not always engaging. Therefore, the student-athletes tended to lose focus and the motivation to learn the material being taught by the instructor. Instructors should

incorporate more interactive modes of teaching/learning in the academic learning environment. Requiring students to have small group discussions about part of the reading assignment and presenting the key points of their discussion to the class is interactive and forces the students to be accountable for the reading material and participate in the class discussion. Setting class expectations at the beginning of the quarter, discouraging the use of phones or computers for anything not related to the classroom learning environment, and making participation and being on time to class part of the students final grades would force them to attend class regularly and stay focused on the relevant learning material. These ideas are suited for the academic learning environment and incorporate elements of learning from the athletic learning environment that the DU Men's Basketball Team indicated were effective learning methods.

### ***Immediate/Direct Feedback***

The method and immediacy of feedback in the academic and athletic learning environment also varied drastically. In the academic learning environment, feedback is presented a week or so after a quiz or test is taken. The student-athlete participants did not find this feedback effective because it is delayed. In the athletic environment, the feedback is very direct, personal, and immediate. The coaches indicate exactly what the student-athlete is doing wrong and give detailed instruction on how to fix the problem. The student-athlete participants found this feedback effective. Instructors in the higher education community should incorporate more immediate and direct feedback in the academic learning environment to support student-athlete learning. In smaller classes, students could peer grade or self-grade quizzes taken within that class period, getting

immediate feedback, and given the opportunity to ask questions if they answered something incorrectly. Utilizing technology to present immediate feedback would also be an effective mode of instruction in the classroom. Displaying/projecting questions in the front of the room and having students use a clicker to indicate the right answer was indicated by a student-athlete as an effective learning method used in one of his classes. Students immediately got feedback once the answer was displayed for everyone to see. The higher education community should utilize more interactive methods of learning within the classroom setting as well as provide opportunities for students to get more immediate feedback on tests/quizzes. This would enable student-athletes to stay more focused and engaged during class and increase the effectiveness of the teaching/learning relationship in the academic learning environment.

### ***Development of Personal Relationships***

The relationship and bond the student-athletes reported they had with their teammates and classmates played a role in the effectiveness of learning within the learning space. As personal relationships develop in the athletic learning environment, the student-athletes reported they look to their teammates for guidance and instruction. In the academic learning environment, the student-athletes rarely develop a tight bond with their classmates because they do not spend much time developing a trusting friendship. The student-athletes are with their teammates over a span of four or five years, while they might have one class with a classmate throughout their entire time at a college/university. Those that represent and support student-athletes in the higher education community, in both the athletic and academic community, should work together to develop an academic

and athletic schedule that will allow student-athletes to take classes with the same students over the span of their academic and athletic career. If student-athletes are able to take classes with the same students over the course of a couple of years, they will have an opportunity to develop a relationship/bond with their classmates, which could positively affect their learning in the academic environment.

### ***Creating Interest in Learning Material***

In both the academic and athletic learning environments, having interest in the learning material motivated student athletes to be proactive and engaged in the learning environment. Academically, if a class or the learning material were interesting to them and/or directly related to their major, they were much more inclined to proactively seek out answers to missed questions on quizzes/tests and stay engaged within the classroom setting. Each student-athlete participant indicated they work hard to become better basketball players at every practice because they are interested and invested in the learning material and motivated to work hard. Literature states that many student-athletes are not able to take certain classes or a certain major because of their time commitment to athletics. The inability to take classes or a major of interest can affect a student-athletes motivation/interest in the academic learning material. Based on my research findings, this can cause student-athletes to be less engaged and less motivated to be successful in the academic learning environment. To ensure that student-athletes have access to classes and any major they choose while in college, the academic and athletic community should evaluate class offering times and practice times in order to accommodate and support student-athlete learning.



### ***Small Class/Team Size***

The student-athlete participants indicated since their basketball team is small, they are a very close knit group and get a lot of direct personal feedback from the coaching staff during practice. The student-athlete participants indicated that having a small class size in the academic learning environment, similar to their small basketball team, enabled more interaction with other students, their instructors, and with the learning material. The instructor was able to spend more time answering questions and providing feedback in smaller classroom settings. Many of the required (core) classes are large lecture based classes because so many students are required to take them. Though it doesn't necessarily make sense and is not feasible to reduce the size of these classes, incorporating break out session or smaller group sessions with a teaching assistants help could better support a student-athletes need for more direct personal attention. The student-athlete participants indicated that smaller class sizes positively influences their ability to learn and engage more comfortably with the learning material.

### ***Engagement with Learning***

Teaching student-athletes how to effectively learn and engage with learning material utilizing the skills they have would positively affect how student-athletes perceive learning in the athletic and academic learning environments. Creating workshops, encouraging student-athletes to get involved in the academic community (clubs or community service), and informing student-athlete support personnel how they can modify their learning environment to best suit student-athlete learning, will benefit both student-athletes and the higher education community.

Based on the research findings, relatively small changes or modifications could be made to the academic and athletic learning environments, with cooperation between the two communities, that could greatly and positively influence the effectiveness of learning within the academic and athletic learning spaces at DU. Though further research would need to be done to determine if other sports have similar feelings regarding learning that the DU Men's Basketball Team expressed, making small changes is a step in the right direction toward listening to the student-athlete participants concerns and setting them up for a successful and meaningful education.

### **Future Research**

This single-case study looked at what influenced learning opportunities/practices in the academic and athletic learning space at DU from the DU Men's Basketball Team perspective. The findings indicate that changes or modifications to the learning environments at DU could benefit the student-athlete participants and positively influence the effectiveness of student-athlete learning in higher education institutions. Since the findings of this study are not generalizable and are specific to the DU Men's Basketball Team experience at DU, this research design could be carried out at a different school, with a different group of student-athletes, to determine if any of the findings hold true or if perceived learning is truly dependent on the student-athlete and the specific learning environment in which they learn. The same research study could be carried out at DU with another sports team (male or female) to determine if any of the findings span sports teams or if they are truly indicative of the perceptions and experiences of the DU Men's

Basketball Team. Carrying out research at a Division II or Division III school might also produce interesting findings.

The findings of this research study stated that direct, interactive learning in individual learning spaces is perceived to influence effective learning opportunities/practices. A future research project could look at interactive teaching practices in the academic learning environment in an effort to engage and motivate student-athlete participation and interest in the academic learning environment. Creating a learning space where students are forced to be focused and engaged with the learning material, with their fellow peers, and with the instructor could produce an environment where students are more interested and motivated to learn.

Also, though all feedback in the academic learning environment cannot be immediate, understanding how the utilization of more immediate feedback in the academic learning environment affects student engagement and student participation within the learning environment could be advantageous. I think higher education institutions could benefit from having a better understanding of how immediate feedback and repetition of a learning concept affects learning opportunities and academic success within the academic learning environment.

This research project looked at the athletic space from a different vantage point than seen in literature. I categorized the athletic space as a learning space. The research opportunities are essentially untouched or untapped when looking at the athletic space from this perspective. Understanding what learning opportunities and practices are

effective for student-athletes in both the athletic and academic learning spaces can help identify ways to improve teaching/learning practices. There is still a lot that can be learned by continuing to conduct research within the athletic and academic learning spaces, uncovering effective teaching/learning practices, and expanding the existing body of literature.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Recruitment Script**

#### **Invitation to Participate in a Research Study**

Are you interested in participating in a future research study about student-athlete learning in both the athletic and academic learning spaces? The study will involve observation of the participants in their athletic and academic learning environment, focus groups, and an individual interview, lasting no more than 90 minutes. You can choose to only participate in the focus group, individual interviews, or observation, though participation in all is encouraged.

If you are interested in participating in this future research study, please respond to this email indicating you are interested in participating.

I will contact you via email in the next 14 days to provide further explanation regarding the purpose/goals of the research study as well as potential dates for observation, a focus group, and an interview.

Thank you for your interest in participating!

Kelli A. Logan  
Ph.D. candidate, Higher Education  
wilkelli17@gmail.com

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent**

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Kelli Logan will describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

### **Invitation to participate in a research study**

You are invited to participate in a research study about student-athlete learning in the athletic and academic learning space in higher education.

You are being asked to be in this research study because you are a male student-athlete basketball player at DU and have experiences and perceptions that will inform my research study.

### **Description of subject involvement**

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group as well as an individual interview. The focus group and interview will take place on or near the DU campus at a time that is convenient for you.

This will take about 60-90 minutes for the focus group and 60-90 minutes for the interview. The focus group and interview will (likely) take place on separate days.

As a participant, the researcher will also observe you in your natural setting in both the athletic learning space (practice, games, weight room, etc.) and academic learning space (classroom, group projects, tutoring sessions, etc.). The researcher will document field notes while observing participants.

### **Possible risks and discomforts**

Since the interviews and focus groups will only ask information about a student's normative and everyday experiences, risk is limited to that which students regularly encounter in their daily activities. Observations will take place in the student's natural setting which presents no additional risk to the student.

The researcher has taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, you may still experience some risks related to your participation, even when the researcher is careful to avoid them. The study may include risks which are currently unforeseeable and that are unknown at this time.

**Possible benefits of the study**

This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about how student-athletes learn in both the athletic and academic setting. If you agree to take part in this study, there will be no direct benefit to you.

However, information gathered in this study may provide insight into the similarities and differences in how student-athletes learn in the athletic and academic environment. The information learned in this study may help uncover effective learning practices for student-athletes in the athletic and academic learning space.

**Study compensation**

You will not receive any payment for being in the study.

**Study cost**

You will not be expected to pay any costs related to the study.

**Confidentiality, Storage and future use of data**

To keep your information safe, the researcher will keep all hard copy documents with identifiable participant information secured in a home office. All electronic documents with identifiable participant information will be kept on the researcher's computer that is password-protected. Your name will not be attached directly to any data, but a study number will be used instead.

The information provided in the focus group and/or interview will be stored in written form on the researcher's personal password-protected computer until the completion of the research study write-up. All information with identifiable participant information will be destroyed no later than January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016.

The researcher will transcribe the focus group and interview audio recording within two weeks after the recording is taken. The researcher will then delete the audio file permanently.

The focus group and interview information will not be made available to other researchers for other studies following the completion of this research study and will not contain information that could identify you as a participant in this study.

The field notes obtained from observations will have no identifiable information on them. They will utilize general terms (student, student-athlete, coach, instructor, etc.) to describe observed situations.

The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published.

### **Who will see my research information?**

Although I will do everything I can to keep your records a secret, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others.

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- Human Subject Research Committee

All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may report that information to the appropriate agencies.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, the information or data you provided will be destroyed. If there are any new findings during the study that may affect whether you want to continue to take part, you will be told about them.

You may choose not to participate or to stop your participation in this research at any time. This will not affect your class standing or grades at DU. The investigator may also end your participation in the research. If this happens, your class standing or grades will not be affected. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you participate in this research.

### **Contact Information**

The researcher carrying out this study is Kelli Logan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may email or call Kelli Logan at [wilkelli17@gmail.com](mailto:wilkelli17@gmail.com) or 720-232-3635.

If the researchers cannot be reached, or if you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher about; (1) questions, concerns or complaints regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects

issues, you may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4015 or by emailing IRBChair@du.edu, or you may contact the Office for Research Compliance by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu, calling 303-871-4050 or in writing (University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121).

**Agreement to be in this study**

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study: I will get a copy of this consent form.

☐

Please initial this box if data from this research may be used for future research.

☐

Please initial this box and provide a valid email (or postal) address if you would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to you. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

☐

Please initial this box if you agree to be audiotaped.

☐

Please initial this box if you do not agree to be audiotaped.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Interview Protocol**

### **Interview: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

I will welcome the participant, thank them for their time, introduce myself, and discuss/complete informed consent. I will explain their name will not be used as an identifier in this study, but rather a participant number.

#### **Introductions:**

##### **Introduction of Research**

My name is Kelli Logan and I am a Ph.D. candidate at DU.

In conducting this study, I am interested in gaining insight and understanding into your experiences and perceptions of learning in both the athletic and academic learning spaces. The goal of this study is to understand how the higher education community can best support student-athlete learning opportunities/practices through the experiences/perceptions you provide.

The interview questions are open-ended and I only want you to share experiences and perceptions you are comfortable sharing. It is not my intent to pressure you into telling me anything you are not comfortable sharing. If at any time during the interview you become uncomfortable, please let me know and we can either stop the interview or move on to a different question. Do you have any questions for me before we get started with the interview?

Student-athlete introduction – Tell me about yourself.

- How did you end up playing basketball at DU? What year are you in school? What is your anticipated major?

#### **Interview:**

1. Describe what a “learning space” means or looks like to you. Do you consider the athletic space where you practice and interact with your teammates and coach(es) a learning space?
2. Do you feel as if you are an important/valued and active member of the academic learning space? Of the athletic space? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel as if your voice/opinion matters in the academic environment? In the athletic environment? Why or why not?

4. Do you feel included in the academic learning environment? In the Athletic learning environment? Why or why not?
5. Do you feel judged or out of place in the academic learning environment? In the Athletic learning environment? Describe.
6. Does the coach/instructor present learning material in a way that is relatable and makes sense to you? What tools/methods are used?

Questions regarding relationship with coach in athletic space.

7. How often do you interact with your coaches?
8. Describe your relationship with your coach(es). Do you feel comfortable asking your coach(es) questions? Asking your coach(es) for feedback?
9. Do you feel like you learn something from your coach(es) during most interactions you have (practice, watching video, meetings, games, etc.)? If so, is that learning experience typically a positive or negative experience for you individually?
10. How does your coach(es) typically provide feedback to you? In a personal or group setting? Written or verbal? Is the feedback immediate, given to you after practice/game, or both? Explain.
11. When you receive negative feedback regarding your performance from your coach(es), how do you feel? Are you motivated or discouraged to improve? Why do you think you feel that way? What about when you receive positive feedback?

Questions regarding relationship with teammates in athletic space.

12. Do you learn from your teammates in the athletic space (practice, watching video, games, etc.)? What does that learning look like?
13. Do you feel comfortable asking your teammates questions? Asking your teammates for feedback? Engaging in discussion regarding what you are learning from your coaches/teammates? Why or why not?
14. Do you feel comfortable asking your coach(es)/teammates questions in front of other coach(es)/teammates?
15. Do interactions in the athletic learning space with your teammates make you feel confident in yourself or question your own abilities?



Questions regarding relationship with teacher in learning space.

16. How often do you interact with your teachers? More or less than coaches? Office hours?
17. Describe your relationship with your teachers. Do you feel comfortable asking your teachers questions? Asking your teachers for feedback?
18. Do you feel like you learn something from your teachers during most interactions you have (classroom, meetings, outside classroom events/setting etc.)? If so, is that learning experience typically a positive or negative experience for you individually?
19. How do your teachers typically provide feedback to you? In a personal or group setting? Written or verbal? Is the feedback immediate, given to you after class in personal meetings, or both? Explain. Which type of feedback (academic/athletic) is more effective for you personally?
20. When you receive negative feedback regarding your performance from your teachers, how do you feel? Are you motivated or discouraged to improve? Why do you think you feel that way? What about when you receive positive feedback?

Questions regarding relationship with classmates in learning space.

21. Do you learn from your classmates in the learning space (classroom, study groups, meetings, etc.)? What does that learning look like? Are your classes Freshman through Senior? Do you think having a mix of grade levels affects learning?
22. Do you feel comfortable asking your classmates questions? Asking your classmates for feedback? Engaging in discussion regarding what you are learning from your teachers/classmates? Why or why not?
23. Do you feel comfortable asking your teachers/classmates questions in front of other teachers/classmates?
24. Do interactions in the academic learning space with your classmates make you feel confident in yourself or question your own abilities?

**Learning: Final Question**

25. Overall, do you feel like you learn better in the athletic or academic learning space? Can you explain why you feel that way?
26. Would you change anything in either learning environment to make learning better? Is there anything you aren't receiving that would make learning more effective?

## **Appendix D: Focus Group Guide**

### **Focus Group Guide**

Welcome to the focus group. The purpose of this focus group interview is to get your perspectives and feedback on different learning situations in the athletic and academic learning space.

1. What does an inclusive learning environment look like to you?
  - a. Is that environment represented in the academic learning environment at DU?
  - b. Is that environment represented in the athletic learning environment at DU?
2. Is information/learning material presented to you in the academic learning environment in a way that is relatable/understandable to you?
  - a. Do you find the methods effective?
3. Is information/learning material presented to you in the athletic learning environment in a way that is relatable/understandable to you?
  - a. Do you find the methods effective?
4. You are in a required class that doesn't really interest you, but you have to take. You receive negative feedback a week after taking a test.
  - a. How do you respond to that negative feedback?
5. You are in a class that is directly related to your major. You received negative feedback on a test a week later.
  - a. How do you respond to that negative feedback? If different from previous response, ask why?
6. You receive immediate negative feedback from a coach in practice or a game.
  - a. How do you respond to that feedback?
7. Which type of feedback, delayed or immediate, helps you learn and is more effective?

Additionally, I may ask some follow-up questions based upon the participants' responses to these questions for additional information or

clarification. Does anyone want to add anything about the topics we have discussed?

## **Appendix E: Observation Protocol**

### Observation Protocol

Where are different people sitting/standing in learning space?

Who is interacting with who?

What does body language indicate? Smiling, eye contact, etc.?

Who is paying attention in the learning space? On phone?  
Computer? Taking Notes? Etc.

Who is asking questions and involved in conversation/instruction in learning environment?

Is the instructor/coach inclusive of all persons in learning environment?

How is learning taking place?

Who is involved/interacting in the teaching/learning exchange?

## Appendix F: Academic Services Resources

### RESUME GUIDELINES



STUDENT LIFE  
Career Services

Your **resume** and cover letter have a single purpose: to obtain an interview. The resume is an advertising tool; it is an organized summary about your qualifications as a potential employee. Start the career planning process by taking a personal inventory of your skills, interests, accomplishments, and experiences. The DU Career Center can assist you with this process. For more information on designing your resume, please go to [www.du.edu/studentlife/career](http://www.du.edu/studentlife/career) and register with DU Careers Online to use the **Resume Builder**.

Since employers may spend as little as 30 seconds reviewing a resume, you must quickly convey a positive vision of who you are and what you can do for the employer. The resume must catch the reader's attention with an attractive, powerful summary.

#### STYLE

Although there is no absolutely "correct" way to present information on your resume, these guidelines will enhance your making the best impression possible:

- Put your most important information near the **top** and **left** to attract the reader's attention.
- List dates of employment in the **right margin**.
- Create a resume using key words that describe your skills, traits, and knowledge since some employers now scan resumes into their databases.
- If you have both related and unrelated experience, consider having two experience sections. For example, someone in the environmental field may have two sections, one labeled Environmental Experience and another labeled Other Experience.
- Choose the resume style that best suits the position you seek. Sample resumes for both chronological and functional styles are available at the end of this handout as well as on the DU Career Center website at <http://www.du.edu/studentlife/career/student/allhandouts.html>. Scroll to the bottom of the page.

#### Chronological

Best used by people whose work experience and history (internships or jobs) is clearly relevant to their job target and by people in fields where the chronological resume is very traditional.

An outline of relevant information listed in reverse chronological order (most recent first). The easiest resume to prepare and often preferred by employers.

#### Functional

Best used by individuals without related paid work experience, career changers, and for people entering or re-entering the job market.

Contains a work history section but emphasizes concrete (verifiable) skills where outcomes or quantifications (\$, %) may strengthen the accomplishments listed.

Skills that are transferred from past experience (not limited to paid work experience) to a future job. What you actually can do, such as organizing, communicating, analyzing, and managing.

Select those skill areas that most apply to the position you are seeking and then briefly describe the experiences that developed those skills. It is not enough just to say you have "strong analytical ability" without providing proof. Communicate what distinguishes you from other applicants with similar skills.

DU Career Center  
Driscoll Student Center South  
(under the bookstore)

Twitter.com/CareerServiceDU  
Facebook.com/DUCareerServices

[www.du.edu/career](http://www.du.edu/career)  
[career@du.edu](mailto:career@du.edu)  
303.871.2150

## RESUME SECTIONS:

### Contact Information

- Always placed at the top of the page since electronic databases scan for this information within the first few lines of the resume.
- Include your name, street address, city, state, zip code, home telephone number and an email address.
- If you feel comfortable, you may include your business telephone number.

### Career Objective

- Convince the employer to interview you by relating everything on your resume to the job objective.
- Use in most situations.
- Provide a concise statement of the position and/or the industry or field desired.
- If you do not include a job objective, be sure to describe your objective in the cover letter. Specifically name the job title and industry you want to target.
- Describe the skills you offer that relate to the position; focus on the **employer's needs**.

### Education

- Any education-related information that enhances the employer's view of you.
- High school information is usually excluded unless it significantly contributes to the vision.
- For undergraduates and new graduates, Education should be listed before the Experience section.

### Include the following information:

- Your degree (e.g. BS or Bachelor of Science), major, and minor. If you have more than one degree, list your most recent and relevant degree first. You may spell out the degree (Bachelor of Arts) or use abbreviations (BA) if commonly understood.
- The name of the college or university, city, state. Add your graduation date and GPA (optional) in the right margin.
- Similar information for any past degrees.

### Optional items:

- A short list of relevant classes or projects completed.
- Add your study abroad college or university, city, country and date.
- High GPA, honors, awards, scholarships, special projects, and certifications.

### Experience:

- Include your most recent job title, employer, city, state, beginning and end dates of employment (month and year), a description of job accomplishments, and outcomes.
- Begin each statement with an action verb (see page 6) and describe your accomplishments and outcomes using bullets.
- Quantify accomplishments using numbers, percentages, time frames, and other specific details. Avoid using personal pronouns (ie: my, I, their, etc) and use a sentence fragment style.
- If you lack paid job experience, include relevant unpaid experience (internship or volunteer).

### Accomplishments

Employers want to learn about your accomplishments and results in the following areas:

- |                        |                                  |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Saving time or money | • Improving products or services |
| • Solving problems     | • Managing a crisis              |

### References

- The names, addresses, and phone numbers of references **ARE NOT** listed on your resume.
- References are usually former employers who can speak about the quality of your work. College professors are appropriate to list if they can discuss your qualifications.

- Obtain permission from your potential references to use them as references.
- Give your references a resume and keep them informed of employers who may contact them.  
Consider coaching your references on your strengths as they relate to specific jobs.

#### Additional Headings

You can create headings to fit the skills you want to highlight. Foreign languages, computer languages, and hardware/software are also often included in a special section. Include a heading if it is relevant in helping the employer get the best possible impression of you and if it relates to the job.

#### Sample Headings

Leadership Experience	Professional Associations
Honors and Awards	Publications
Extracurricular Activities	Volunteer/Service Work
Computer Skills	Foreign Languages
International Experience	Presentations
Research Projects	Certifications and Licenses

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE WITH EXTENSIVE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

A Summary of Qualifications section highlights your skills, relevant accomplishments, and educational background in either a paragraph or bulleted format at the top of the resume (below the contact information). The summary may be used in place of, or in addition to, a career objective.

##### Sample of Summary of Qualification—in paragraph format:

Over six years experience teaching young children. Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology. Certificate in Elementary Education. Successfully organized early childhood programs. Bilingual in Spanish and English.

##### Sample of Summary of Qualifications—with bullets:

- Sixteen years of CIS and Telecommunications consulting experience with Fortune 100 companies.  
Comprehensive expertise in frame relay fiber optics, computer networks, ATM's and telephony.
- Master in Telecommunications and Bachelor of Science in CIS from the University of Denver.
- Six years experience in Project Management with cross functional teams of up to 40 people.

#### SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Some people have individual situations or concerns that may impact their resumes. If you are unsure of how to best present yourself on a resume, please schedule a meeting with a Career Counselor at the DU Career Center, 303-871-2150, to discuss your concerns.

##### Special situations may include:

- Gaps in employment history
- Being downsized or laid off
- Involvement in controversial organizations
- Termination from a job



## AN ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITY: PIONEER CAREERS

Be sure to register with Pioneer Careers. Upload and **"Opt-in"** your resume to advertise yourself to employers.

1. If you have not already done so, go to [www.du.edu/studentlife/career](http://www.du.edu/studentlife/career) to register for Pioneer Careers and complete the **Profile** tab. Please complete your profile with as much information as possible. If you choose to "opt-in" to the Resume Referral program, we use this information to search for applicants. Go to the **Privacy Tab** and select **Yes** next to **Include in Resume Books**.
2. After you complete your profile, click on the **Documents/Opt-in Resume Books** tab and upload your resume(s). Use this tab to upload your resumes, cover letters and any other job/internship search documents.
3. Employers contact the Career Center when looking for qualified candidates to fill positions. With our Resume Referral Service, we can give employers access to resumes or email resumes directly to employers.
4. If you would like to be a part of the Resume Referral program, be sure to have a "Default" resume and check "Yes" next to the "Include in Resume Books" section on the Privacy tab in your Profile
5. In addition, students and alumni can apply online for Interviews/On-Campus Recruiting as well as search jobs, internships, employers and career-related events.

## KEYS TO AN EFFECTIVE RESUME

Customize:	If you are seeking more than one type of job, you may want several resumes with different career objectives or job targets.
Length:	Unless you have extensive, relevant experience, limit yourself to one page.
Specific:	Concise, detailed, results-oriented phrases get maximum interest, e.g., "Trained and managed three sales clerks in women's clothing section, averaging highest weekly sales out of six departments." Concisely describe your career objective, skills/qualifications, education, work history, and interests. Think of the job or internship as an unmet need of an employer. Research the key skills for the type of position that interests you. Write statements that reflect these skills.
Language:	When possible, use the terminology or jargon of the employer.
Quantify:	Describe your duties and accomplishments with measurable data, e.g. dollars, percents, numbers, and frequency. Use adjectives and adverbs to describe your actions and results with detailed descriptions. Be specific about your skills and competencies; emphasize those skills most related to the position.
Design:	Make the resume inviting to read with attractive headings, a good balance of black and white, wide margins, and a limited selection of font sizes and styles. Do not use less than 10-point font. Bullets and columns can make it easier for employers to quickly review your resume. Do not use margins smaller than .5". Avoid using open bullets and italics when electronic scanning software may be used such as by larger organizations.
Highlight:	The reader's eye goes first to the top, left side of the resume and this is where to place your most important information. Headings and important details can be given extra emphasis by careful use of indenting, underlining, or bolding.
Proofread:	Have your resume critiqued by several people, including a professional in your field and a Career Counselor at the DU Career Center. Grammar, spelling, or typographical errors are unacceptable.
Consistency:	It is critical to provide information in a consistent format within each section of your resume. For example, present each of your jobs consistently with job titles, employer name, location, and dates in the same order.

Printing: Laser quality print on 24# weight laser-compatible paper is suggested. If you fax or scan your resume, always use white paper.

#### SPECIAL CAUTIONS FOR AN ONLINE JOB SEARCH

In the age of identity theft, there are steps you can take to protect yourself during an online job search.

- Select the option to post an "identity-suppressed resume" that are available on reputable job posting sites.
- Set up a separate, anonymous email address just for your job search.
- Read the job posting site's privacy statement and your ability to delete your resume after you find a job. Find out if your resume will be shared with other job sites. Avoid using sites that do not give you information on how your data will be used, shared, or stored.
- Be wary of employer's requests for copies of driver's licenses or other personal information.
- Call the employer directly (find the number on your own) and verify the information they are seeking.
- Keep track of everything you post online to make it easier to delete and prove exactly what you posted and where you posted it.
- If it sounds too good to be true, then it probably is!

# ACTION VERB SAMPLE LIST

Accomplished	Developed	Obtained
Achieved	Devised	Organized
Administered	Directed	Oversaw
Advised	Discovered	Participated
Analyzed	Edited	Performed
Appraised	Eliminated	Persuaded
Arbitrated	Ensured	Piloted
Arranged	Equipped	Prepared
Assessed	Established	Presented
Assisted	Evaluated	Produced
Audited	Examined	Programmed
Bought	Expanded	Projected
Briefed	Financed	Promoted
Brought	Forecast	Publicized
Budgeted	Formulated	Purchased
Built	Founded	Qualified
Calculated	Generated	Questioned
Changed	Governed	Raised profits
Chaired	Graded Guided	Recommended
Collected	Handled	Recorded
Communicated	Hypothesized	Reduced
Completed	Implemented	Researched
Conceptualized	Improved	Reviewed
Conducted	Initiated	Selected
Consolidated	Instituted	Solved
Constructed	Introduced	Specified
Controlled	Investigated	Structured
Coordinated	Maintained	Summarized
Counseled	Managed	Supervised
Created	Modified	Systematized
Critiqued	Monitored	Tested
Delivered	Negotiated	Trained
Demonstrated	Observed	Translated
Designed		Wrote
Determined		

## RESUME CHECKLIST

### General:

- Always include a cover letter. A well-written cover letter can only increase your chance for an interview.
- Write your resume yourself. If you cannot effectively write about yourself, you may be ineffective in selling yourself during an interview.
- Proofread for typographical, spelling, and grammar errors. Ask a DU Career Counselor to critique your resume.
- Use quality paper and a quality laser printer.
- Understand the impact of potentially controversial information such as inclusion of your religious or political affiliations, your sexual orientation, or detailed, personal information. Is there a compelling reason for including the information? Does it relate to the job?
- Keep your resume focused and targeted to a specific job.
- Prioritize experience and education sections depending upon the employer's needs. Focus on higher level and transferable skills.
- Include specific examples of significant accomplishments and results.

### Language:

- Avoid vague objectives such as "Seeking a challenging position."
- Find appropriate synonyms rather than using the same words repeatedly.
- Describe the positive results or outcomes of your actions or duties.
- Exclude abbreviations that the employer is not likely to understand.
- Speak positively about your background and skills, persuasively relating them to your job objective.
- Be consistent with verb tenses. Use past tense verbs with jobs in the past, and present tense verbs for current positions.
- Use action verbs to start the phrases in the experience section of your resume.
- Use key words (nouns and short phrases) when you know your resume will be scanned into a database.
- Eliminate extraneous information.

---

## OBJECTIVE

A managerial track in the high-tech or consulting sector utilizing my financial, analytical, and communication skills.

## EDUCATION

BS, Business Administration in Finance and Management  
University of Denver, Daniels College of Business      Denver, CO      June 20xx  
G.P.A. 3.6/4.0

Relevant Courses: Advanced Management Concepts, Financial Analysis I-III,  
Business Communication, Business Decision Making

Institute for Shipboard Education, University of Pittsburgh      Summer 20xx

## EXPERIENCE

**Assistant Night Manager**  
MTC Trucking Company      Denver, CO      Fall 20xx-present  
Supervised ten delivery drivers and warehouse workers  
Calculated and presented bids for four contracts  
Increased contracted miles by 32%  
Boosted revenue by 10% in six months

**Finance Analyst Intern**  
GBI Business Services      Denver, CO      Summer 20xx  
Developed and maintained company's relationship with potential clients  
Researched and determined potential acquisitions for clients  
Maintained database on target companies

**Assistant Manager/Staff Instructor**  
Paradise Rock Gym      Westminster, CO      20xx-20xx  
Hired, trained, and scheduled 14 employees  
Assisted customers with purchases and provided excellent service  
Instructed clients in technical rock climbing skills

## SKILLS

**Languages:** Working knowledge of Spanish  
**Computer:** MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, MS Access, Internet research

## LEADERSHIP/EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Treasurer, DU Alpine Club      20xx-present Member, Alpha  
Gamma Pi, DU Finance Club      20xx-present Social Chair, Delta Delta Delta  
Sorority      20xx-20xx Team Member, DU Women's Club Lacrosse  
20xx-20xx

## OBJECTIVE

To contribute to the Marketing arena in an entry-level position where my research, leadership, and communication skills can be utilized.

## EDUCATION

University of Denver, Denver, CO

Bachelor of Arts in English, 2012

Minors in Business and Leadership GPA: 3.6

Study Abroad, London, England, Fall 20xx

Additional travels to: Switzerland, France, Italy, Ireland, and Scotland

## AWARDS

Chancellor's Scholarship (highest award), 20xx-20xx

Summer Internship Scholarship, Summer 20xx

Cherrington Global Scholars, Fall 20xx

## WORK EXPERIENCE

Ashe Communications, Denver, CO

**Marketing Coordinator** May-December 20xx

- Coordinated and compiled newspaper and magazine ads, collateral material and website updates for the 2012 Cherry Creek Arts Festival.
- Managed national public relations campaign for Hunter S. Thompson Tribute beer resulting in coverage by *Rolling Stone*, *Playboy* and other media.
- Created and distributed monthly press releases for Denver's branch of "It's Just Lunch," a dating service for business professionals.
- Communicated with clients managing overall campaigns- advertising for print, direct marketing via mail and email, public relations, and tradeshow.

Adelea Staffing, Greenwood Village, CO

**Administrative Assistant**, September 20xx-March 20xx

- Managed phone calls for a mortgage company with over 1000 employees.
- Learned multiple data system programs to update client records.
- Updated and increased skills in Microsoft Excel, Word, Powerpoint, and Outlook.

Henry Gill Advertising, Denver, CO

**Account Services Intern**, January-March 20xx

- Assisted Dairy Queen managers in determining advertising dollars for local campaigns and scheduled monthly management meetings.
- Researched and wrote advertising copy on career development tips for University of Phoenix radio spots.

Commotion Advertising Agency, Golden, CO

**Account Executive Intern**, September- December 20xx

- Brainstormed with creative team to create advertising proposals for new clients including print, email, trade show, advertising, and brochures.
- Researched and compiled new business reports and proposals for alternative advertising.

## Activities

Pi Lambda Chi Latina Sorority, President, Scholarship Chair and Vice President of Membership



# COVER LETTER GUIDELINES

## THE NUMBER ONE RULE FOR WRITING COVERLETTERS:

Tailor each cover letter to the organization to which you are writing

### Sample Outline:

(match heading resume heading)

Your address

City, State, Zip

Email, Phone

(1-2" top margin)

(Heading)

Date

(double space)

(Dateline)

Mr. /Ms. Name, Title

(double space)

Company

(Inside address)

Address

City, State, Zip

(double space)

Dear Mr. /Ms. Last Name:

(double space)

**Introductory Paragraph:** This is the attention grabber that should arouse the reader's interest. If you are applying for a specific job, mention the position title and position number (if applicable). Give the person's name, if someone referred you to the company. This paragraph may include your knowledge of the organization, why you want to work for them and some brief background experience/education that relates to the position. Most introductory paragraphs are short, so be brief and clear.

(double space)

**Middle Paragraph:** This is the sales pitch. It is the longest of your paragraphs (may be split into two paragraphs) where you attempt to persuade the employer that you are worth an interview. Present specific abilities, education, and/or experience that make you an attractive candidate for the position. Highlight special skills. Reveal a personal goal that could be realized with this firm. Prove that your skills and abilities match the job description and can satisfy the employer's needs.

(double space)

**Final Paragraph:** This is the request for action. Ask for an interview or a meeting to discuss how your skills might assist the employer. Offer to provide more information (e.g. samples of your work, more details of your past experience or education, etc.). In most cases take the lead and indicate that you will be calling to arrange an appointment or if the employer specifically indicated not to call, you may ask them to call you. Provide your telephone number.

(double space)

Sincerely,

(complimentary close)

(four spaces)

Signature here

Your name

(signature block)

### **Other Rules to Remember**

In referencing a personal referral, state that the referral suggested you write or email the contact. Utilize impressive quotes from letters of reference in your cover letter, e.g. I am highly organized; my internship supervisor stated in her letter of reference, "Pat is the most organized intern I have ever had."

Use brief personal examples to back up what you say about yourself, e.g. "Several instructors have consistently commented on my excellent writing skills."

Talk about and quantify your accomplishments that relate to the position.

Be brief and concise, no more than one page.

Proof-read and have others proof-read your letter for errors; the Career Center Career Counselors will help review your cover letter.

Do not overuse "I" to begin sentences, vary the sentence structure.

Single space within each paragraph, double space between paragraphs

Always sign your cover letter except for email versions.

Matching the paper and heading of your cover letter to the heading of your resume, (for hard copies), is a nice professional touch.

If you lack a skill or some required experience discuss how you can pick up the skill quickly, or how other experience will substitute.

It is common to have the cover letter be the text of an email, with the resume attached.

### **Mistakes to Avoid**

Never misrepresent your background, skills and experiences.

Never sound desperate or negative.

Never confess shortcomings; give a positive slant to your background and experience.

Do not repeat your resume, but summarize and enhance, add your best personality traits and adjectives that are not on the resume.

Always send an email version of your cover letter and resume to yourself first to make sure it opens up perfectly.

Always read and follow any employer instructions for submitting a cover letter and resume.



July 6, 20xx

Mr. .  
Employment Manager  
id Company

Dear Mr. .:

As an admirer of Sam Dalton, I watched several years ago when S-Mart opened a store in my hometown. I was intrigued by the wonders of mass distribution, discount prices, and retail innovation. I read in last week's edition of *Sports Retail* that one of your subsidiaries, SkiLand, is looking to grow beyond the 200 retail stores it currently operates in the Northeast. My human resource approach can help your company make sound strategic personnel decisions as you expand into the Rocky Mountain region. Your advertised position as Human Resources Manager fits perfectly with my background and experience.

For the past six years, I held increasingly responsible positions in the human resources profession. I began my career as an Assistant Store Manager at Dart Brothers, a large sporting goods store, and was promoted to Manager after 18 months. Three years ago, I accepted a position as Director of HR for Cysco, another rapidly growing distributor of food products supplying large restaurant chains. At both Dart Brothers and Cysco, I served as an HR Generalist and am very familiar with all aspects of personnel functions including: recruiting, staff planning, professional development training, working with unions, employee relations and enhancement programs as well as salary and benefits programs.

I am very enthusiastic about having an opportunity to discuss your management team's plans for the future, and the Human Resources department's role in making these goals a reality. I will call you the week of July 12th to confirm the receipt of my resume and schedule a mutually convenient time for us to get together. Thank you for your consideration and time.

Sincerely Yours,

# REQUESTING AND USING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION



*"My loss is your gain! Jason took more initiative, as a communications intern, than many of my full-time employees!"*

*"I could count on Lisa to get her assigned tasks done, on time and in the manner I wanted. I'm sure you'll quickly come to value her follow-through as much as I did. I'd hire her back in a heartbeat!"*

*"She's the best! It's rare to find someone with Jennifer's combination of professionalism, enthusiasm and reliability."*

Letters of recommendation from former/current employers can be very helpful in your search for a job/internship. How can they help? **By adding some pizzazz!** Consider them as the spice that makes your sales pitch more effective.

Cover letters are frequently boring to employers since they often state the obvious. One common line is "I'm looking for a challenging position," yet how many applicants are seeking a dull position? Using a *hot* quote from a former/current employer in your cover letter can add zest. (If you can't get someone to speak highly of you, are you sure you are putting forth enough effort in your work?) Bad hiring decisions cost the employer time and money. A former employer who speaks glowingly about you can provide a future employer with the assurance that you are the one who will do the job effectively.

Specific comments about the accomplishments, skills, knowledge, and attitudes that you have proven already and that are likely to be of great interest to the future employer are extremely valuable. Face it, if a friend of yours speaks glowingly about a particular model of car he bought, you're much more likely to have a favorable opinion than if you just listen to the advertising of the dealership. Relevant examples to illustrate your features are critically important in ensuring the employers have a good grasp of, and remember, your best features.

## Tips for Requesting the Letter of Recommendation:

- Give the writer a brief list of the skills or qualities that you would like them to focus on in the letter. You can dramatically increase the chance of getting hot quotes from a letter of recommendation by asking the letter writer to focus on those features you want to emphasize.
- Don't ask someone for a reference if you don't believe he or she will say good things about you.
- Your former or current supervisor might ask *you* to write the letter that he or she will put on letterhead and sign. While this is more work for you, it can be a useful exercise for you to help you assess and emphasize your skills and your contribution to the organization.
- Proof the original copy of the letter of recommendation in case you are asked to supply proof.
- Always send a thank you card to the writer of the letter of recommendation.

## How to Integrate a Quote from a Letter of Recommendation:

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*Use a quote in your cover letter...*

- *in your introductory paragraph* to quickly capture the reader's attention
- *within the body of your cover letter* to prove one of your qualities
- *in your concluding paragraph* as an emphatic summarizing statement

**Using Quotes from Letters of Recommendation in the Interview:**

"So...tell me about yourself" is the most common way that interviewers begin. Quotes can be a key ingredient in your response: mentioning what a former employer said about you becomes a personal testimonial to your positive qualities. Take along your letters of recommendation to your interview as a powerful tool in getting the employer's attention and/or proving the accomplishments, skills, knowledge, and attitudes you claim.

# 50 QUESTIONS RECRUITERS ASK

## COLLEGE SENIORS



Listed below are fifty questions asked by employers during interviews with college seniors. Read the questions and formulate your answers. A good interview often determines whether or not you get hired. Remember nothing beats good preparation, and practicing answering these may help you give your best interview:

1. What are your long range and short range goals and objectives, when and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
2. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next 10 years?
3. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
4. What do you really want to do in life?
5. What are your long range career objectives?
6. How do you plan to achieve you career goals?
7. What are the most important rewards you expect in your business career?
8. What do you expect to be earning in five years?
9. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
10. Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
11. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
12. How would you describe yourself?
13. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
14. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
15. How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?
16. Why should I hire you?
17. What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in business?
18. How do you determine or evaluate success?
19. What do you think it takes to be successful in a company like ours?
20. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
21. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
22. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and subordinates.
23. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
24. Describe your most rewarding college experience.
25. If you were hiring a graduate for this position, what qualities would you look for?
26. Why did you select your college or university?
27. What led you to choose your field of major study?
28. What college subjects did you like best? Why?
29. What college subjects did you like least? Why?

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30. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
31. What changes would you make in your college or university?
32. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
33. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
34. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
35. In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
36. How do you work under pressure?
37. In what part-time work are you interested? Why?
38. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
39. Why did you decide to seek a position with this company?
40. What do you know about our company?
41. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
42. Are you seeking employment in a company of a certain size? Why?
43. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
44. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
45. Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?
46. Are you willing to travel?
47. Are you willing to spend at least six months as a trainee?
48. Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our company is located?
49. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
50. What have you learned from your mistakes?

Based on a report on recruiting conducted by Dr. Frank Endicott

# ONE MINUTE COMMERCIAL



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## The Elevator Speech

A **one minute commercial** is an introduction of yourself prepared to use any time you have the opportunity to speak to a potential employer, client, or anyone you would like to add to your network of contacts. It is a message created to communicate who you are - your "personal brand". Think of yourself as a salesperson with a very personal product to sell (you). What would you want to say in a 30-second to two minute commercial for yourself that you would put on your favorite radio station? Or think of getting into an elevator and maximizing your opportunity to meet someone who may be influential in your career direction in the time it takes an elevator to go between floors. An **"elevator speech"** is another name for a short description of who you are that stimulates conversation. It captivatingly summarizes your skills, abilities, and previous experiences.

Keep it simple and brief and include:

- ☐ Who you are
- ☐ What you want to do for businesses or people
- ☐ How businesses or people benefit from what you do

Illustrate how you are unique with a short story demonstrating your qualities using strong, action-packed words. Make a connection between yourself and your new acquaintance. End with a question leading them into conversation. If job searching, include your target statement, stating what position you are seeking, job title, function, and industry. Be adaptable by tailoring it to your audience and sound natural by not memorizing it; but practice! This is a speech you can prepare ahead of time and rehearse, so that you know exactly the message you want to convey.

You can use your one minute commercial in several ways. In an interview, it can be a great answer to the common question, "Tell me about yourself." After applying for a position, you can contact the employer to follow up by either phone or email. While networking for job possibilities or unexpectedly meeting someone new, it will allow you to make a good first impression. You may be making contacts for new customers. It is useful when you attend an event, a conference, a convention, or some other type of meeting with networking opportunities.

## SAMPLES

"Hello. My name is Eileen Conner. I'm a production assistant with a B.A. in Communications and three years of solid broadcasting and public relations background. I have extensive experience developing and researching topics, pre-interviewing guests, and producing on-location video tapings. I've been watching your station for some time and I've been impressed with your innovative approach and your fast growth. I recently sent you my resume and was wondering if you anticipate any openings that might be appropriate for someone with my experience?"

"During my career, I've been a senior manager in banking involved in activities such as creating, building, and re-engineering departments, designing management information systems, negotiating deals, and mentoring high-potential employees. Most recently, I've taken a sabbatical to get my Master of Management degree, which I've chosen to add to my original MBA. While I think it's important to keep an eye on the bottom line, I'm fully convinced that people are a company's most valuable assets. I'm looking for a management role that will combine my background and interests in human resources and finance. I see myself working most effectively in a small to mid-sized company. What's most important to me is that I be able to create an environment that brings out the best in people while being financially successful and market-driven."

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## DEVELOPING YOUR ONE MINUTE COMMERCIAL

List accomplishments—paid, unpaid, work, education, life, experiences...

List your most important skills and strengths...

What are you interested in doing? Internships, job openings, company information...

Tie these aspects together to create a consistent message about who you are.

### One Minute Script Ideas

Hello, I am \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ major(s) and \_\_\_\_\_ minor(s).

My interests are in \_\_\_\_\_ industry, or field of work or I'd like to know more about the \_\_\_\_\_ industry.

I've had experience in or as a \_\_\_\_\_, where I developed skills in \_\_\_\_\_ ( this could be in a organization, volunteer, internship, etc.).

I've also gained a lot of experience in \_\_\_\_\_ through my (other job, school work, volunteer, etc.).

I noticed in my research that your organization hires \_\_\_\_\_. What do you look for in new hires?

I wonder if I might call you and follow up to see if we could meet and talk in more depth about opportunities in the future? Do you have a card or contact information?



# NETWORKING



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Approximately 75% of all professional positions are filled through networking!

Everybody networks to find: who sells the best products, provides the best services...and has the hidden jobs! In fact, Mark Gronowetter, a sociologist at Harvard, found in a study some time ago that about 75% of all professional and technical positions are filled through personal contacts. Richard Bolles, author of the best-selling book *What Color is Your Parachute*, suggests an 86% hiring success rate in using personal contacts (your network) to get to the "person-who-actually-has-the-power-to-hire-you". Your contacts have the potential to open doors. Make networking a part of your daily routine!

## PURPOSE

Networking is building rapport with people to encourage them to provide leads and contacts. It is a way to obtain information, advice, resources and referrals. Connecting with people and sharing information is critical today.

## PLACES AND PEOPLE FOR NETWORKING

- |                          |                  |                     |
|--------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| -Student organizations   | -Alumni          | -In the classroom   |
| -Volunteer activities    | -Internships     | -Career fairs       |
| -Relatives/acquaintances | -Employees       | -Professional       |
| -Co-workers              | -Your references | - Other job hunters |

## NETWORKING STRATEGY

1. Develop a list of every potential contact. Use LinkedIn especially to research which contacts might know someone you'd like to meet. Talk with (or message) your list of contacts about what kind of job you are looking for and how you they might help you. If you haven't yet defined the position, start with conducting Informational Interviews to help you determine your focus, (see Informational Interviewing tip sheet). Describe a job function even if you do not feel comfortable naming a title (i.e.: type of work, industry or setting, and level of responsibility). Use Informational Interviewing to expand your contacts, including the Pioneer Career Network. Give your contact a brief outline of your skills and experience, develop a "one minute commercial", (see One Minute Commercial handout), presentation.

2. Write or call the person to whom your contact referred you and mention the referral's name. Explain that while a position may not currently be available, the opportunity to talk with them is just as valuable and that you would need only a brief meeting. If you write, be sure to follow up with a phone call within a week.

3. In your meeting, let the new contact know what you are looking for (concisely in a few sentences) and ask for advice and suggestions on what avenues you might pursue. This is also a good

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opportunity to get an industry opinion on your resume and whether or not it will accomplish your objective in that industry. Do not conclude a meeting without asking if the contact can refer you to someone else. If no additional contacts come to mind, ask if you can call back in a few days to see if they think of anyone else. Prepare personal business cards and leave a card with basic information (name, email, phone, website, etc.).

4. Always follow up any referral or meeting with a thank you note. A person likes to know that their time is well spent and appreciated. Be personal and specific. Keep your contact informed of the result of any follow-up you do on their suggestions which results in a new lead or a job.

5. Keep a personal log of your contacts, who they were referred by, and to whom they referred you. It is important to be able to backtrack if necessary because an opportunity may arise for you to return the favor.

## SKILLS IDENTIFICATION

### I. WORKING WITH PEOPLE

#### A. Helping/Human Relations Skills

1. active listening, caring, developing rapport and trust
2. understanding, empathizing, accepting
3. motivating, encouraging, supporting
4. helping others clarify alternatives, values and needs
5. counseling, advising
6. assessing needs
7. interviewing, referring, consulting
8. collaborating with others, working as a team
9. rehabilitating, helping people change
10. dealing constructively with difficult people/situations
11. intervening, mediating, resolving
12. advocating, negotiating for others, confronting
13. working with groups, assisting group interaction
14. working with special populations
15. community relations, social service

#### B. Management Skills

1. organization, coordinating (people, programs, structures)
2. supervising, managing, directing
3. establish, plan, develop, implement policies and procedures
4. producing, setting up, maintaining
5. assigning, scheduling, arranging
6. problem-solving, trouble-shooting
7. coordinating personnel, motivating people
8. developing potential in others
9. reconciling conflicts, mediating
10. negotiating, bargaining
11. consulting, collaborating
12. identifying/mobilizing resources

#### C. Communication/Teaching Skills

1. speaking, conversing
2. using humor
3. dealing with general public
4. answering questions, providing information
5. directing people to other resources
6. telephone skills
7. composing, expressing
8. office writing, memos, letters, reports, minutes
9. technical writing—translating scientific/specialized jargon into general terms, designing manuals
10. journalistic writing—newspapers, magazines
11. proofreading, editing, revising, adapting
12. reading, translating, interpreting
13. language skills (general or specific)

14. briefing, explaining, illustrating concepts with samples
15. teaching, instructing, coaching, tutoring
16. training, demonstrating
17. public speaking, lecturing
18. leading discussion groups/workshops
19. thinking on your feet, speaking extemporaneously
20. performing in public
21. radio, television, media (communication arts)

#### D. Public Relations/Promotions Skills

1. representing (an employer, an organization, an issue)
2. advertising, publicizing
3. persuading, influencing, convincing
4. lobbying, building support, advocating
5. coordinating conflicting groups to work together
6. fund raising
7. selling (commodities, services, programs, ideas)
8. public presentations, debating
9. radio and television appearances
10. promotional writing, sales copy, advertisements
11. public information, press releases, newsletters, publicity
12. developing targets, marketing, doing needs assessment
13. organizing, planning, executing
14. producing, directing (ad campaign, publicity, marketing)
15. making audio-visual presentations
16. conducting public affairs/ceremonies
17. displaying showmanship, theatrical poise, stage presence
18. conducting group tours/orientations

#### E. Administrative/Leadership

1. initiating action, working without supervision
2. defining objectives, setting standards
3. making/implementing decisions
4. analyzing situations objectively
5. simplifying complex problems (breaking them down)
6. prioritizing tasks, revising goals
7. evaluating, reviewing, recommending
8. managing time
9. working well under stress, improvising
10. delegating responsibility
11. politicking, compromising
12. chairing meetings, coordinating groups
13. responsibility for overall effectiveness of group/program organizational structure
14. processing information to get at real crux of issues

## OVER

## II. WORKING WITH DATA

### A. Numbers/Finance/Office Skills

1. computing, calculating, estimating, projecting
2. bookkeeping, accounting, auditing
3. cost analysts, financial planning, budget management
4. taking inventory, appraising, purchasing, buying
5. filing, classifying, collating
6. designing/maintaining filing systems
7. designing office forms, procedures
8. using statistics, compiling statistical reports
9. attention to detail, follow-through, accuracy, precision

### B. Research Analysis

1. gathering information from varying sources (books, physical data, directly from people)
2. investigating, surveying, collecting
3. organizing, classifying, sorting information into categories
4. dissecting, abstracting, seeing patterns of meaning, of results

5. interpreting, analyzing statistical/scientific data, drawing conclusions
6. conceptualizing coming up with theories
7. developing models, methodologies, ideas
8. writing articles, summaries, reports
9. synthesizing, getting to essence of core tasks
10. seeing inter-relations between different phenomena
11. processing large amounts of information

### C. Observation/Problem Solving

1. sensing, perceiving, examining
2. recording impressions
3. diagnosing, estimating, anticipating, projecting
4. inspecting, assessing, defining, narrowing focus
5. clarifying, identifying, measuring
6. designing experiments and tests
7. tracing errors to their source
8. adapting theory to specific problem-situations
9. reviewing, critiquing, interpreting results

---

## III. WORKING WITH THINGS

### A. Physical/Mechanical Skills

1. manual dexterity
2. doing precision work, small physical detail
3. performing intricate lab procedures, preparing slides
4. operating equipment, computers, scientific instruments, laboratory machinery, mechanical devices
5. using tools operated by heavy machinery (trucks, cranes)
6. skilled-trades—carpentry, masonry, plumbing
7. refinishing furniture, doing small remodeling
8. outdoor work (environment, recreation, scientific field work)
9. plant care, gardening, farming, landscaping
10. working with animals, animal care
11. hiking, walking, camping, bicycling, swimming
12. athletic aptitude, movement/dance
13. cooking
14. craft skills (knitting weaving)
15. traveling, navigating

### B. Design and Construction

1. molding, shaping, composing
2. assembling, installing, building, constructing
3. fixing adapting, repairing
4. measuring, physical accuracy or quality
5. drawing plans, drafting
6. mechanical problem solving, mechanical ingenuity
7. spatial perception
8. design/invention of tools or instruments
9. designing more efficient technical procedures
10. artistic design—clothes, costumes, theater sets
11. interior/exterior design, landscaping

# INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES



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## “TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF”

The interview is a two-way exchange of information designed to determine if there is a match between you and the employer. While the employer is evaluating you, you are evaluating him/her to determine compatibility with your skills, values and interests.

Employers begin to evaluate you from the first moment they see you; within the first 30 seconds an employer makes a judgment about you. It is very difficult to change this initial opinion. It is critical that you know how to project a positive image within the first few minutes with direct eye contact, a smile, a friendly greeting and a firm handshake.

Remember, the most stressful thing about an interview is not being prepared and believing you have to have “all the right answers.” First, there are no right answers; only your honest and sincere responses. Second, there are ways to prepare to eliminate most of the stress of an interview. The best interviews are when you **prepare** and **practice** prior to the interview.

### PREPARATION – KNOW YOURSELF:

#### Skills/Interests:

Identify strengths, key abilities, interests and personality characteristics that demonstrate the best you have to offer. Identify specific events that demonstrate these strengths, abilities and characteristics.

#### Education and Experience:

Analyze your accomplishments, abilities, activities, academic work and internships.

#### Goals:

Articulate your short-and long-terms goals and how they complement the organization.

#### Values:

What do you need in a career? What do you hope to achieve through your career? What is important to you? A few sample values include:

- |                                      |  |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Help others | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence over people | <input type="checkbox"/> Compensation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competition | <input type="checkbox"/> Security              | <input type="checkbox"/> Variety      |

### KNOW THE FIELD/EMPLOYER

#### Knowledge of profession or field

- ☐ Know the professional concepts, jargon and trends
- ☐ Know the skills, expertise and experience necessary to succeed
- ☐ Be able to discuss your background, various skills and experiences as they relate to the position and the employer

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- ☐ Highlight your transferable skills

#### Know the employer (research the employer)

- ☐ Mission and philosophy
- ☐ Their past, present and future
- ☐ Their reputation
- ☐ Products and services
- ☐ Needs
- ☐ Competition

#### Where to research

- ☐ Conduct informational interviews
- ☐ Utilize the Pioneer Career Network
- ☐ Study employer web site and promotional literature if available
- ☐ Read newspapers/journals/trade magazines
- ☐ Research and consider joining a professional association
- ☐ Contact the local Chamber of Commerce

#### PRACTICE:

Rehearse common interview questions on your own or with a trusted friend. You may also schedule a mock interview appointment with the Career Center to practice your interviewing skills. Dress professionally and bring your resume to the appointment.

#### THE INTERVIEW:

Arrive 10-15 minutes before your scheduled interview. If possible, visit the location the day before to be sure you know where you are going. Be prepared. Act confident. Dress for success. Be yourself. Try to relax.

- **What to Bring**

Bring extra copies of your resume and a list of your references. Be prepared with a written list of questions for the interviewer and samples of your work, if appropriate.

- **What to Wear**

*For Women:* A suit or pantsuit in muted tones. Avoid low cut blouses or frilly materials. Hosiery should always be considered, but nothing with a pattern.

*For Men:* Dark suits, matching socks, a coordinated collared shirt and conservative tie

*For Both:* Conservative is usually the best guideline. It is better to over dress than under dress. Polished shoes and ironed blouses and shirts are the little details that get noticed. Avoid perfume or cologne. Hair should be neat, clean and not draw attention.

- **Format**

*Warm Up:* The interview begins with a greeting and handshake along with an explanation of the structure of the interview.

*Data Gathering:* The bulk of the interview is filled with open-ended questions, behavior-based interview questions, follow up questions and a determination for fit and chemistry.

*Interviewee Questions:* This is your chance to ask questions and gather your own data.

*Closing:* Next steps and wrap up of any additional questions and details.

- **Interview Questions**

- ☐ Behavior-Based Interviewing (BBI) is a common type of interview. Past behaviors are good predictors of future behaviors. The questions are open-ended, focus on past events and encourage the interviewee to talk at length about a particular past event. A typical opening for a BBI is "Tell me about a time

when..." Therefore, specific details communicate the best you have to offer.

- ☑ In order to answer BBI questions thoroughly, utilize the **STAR Strategy**. Set the scene by giving an example of a Situation or Task (**S/T**) you experienced. Proceed by explaining the actions or steps you took (**A**) in the process. Complete your answer by discussing the outcome or results (**R**) of your actions. Practice using this technique to keep your answers specific and concise. As a general guideline, prepare several stories to adapt to BBI questions.

- ☑ Sample response: "Give an example of a time when your demonstrated initiative."  
*"In the summer before my senior year, I was an intern at the American Cancer Society. One of my projects was to assist with fundraising and corporate sponsorships for an upcoming charity event (S/T). It became apparent that we were still about \$25,000 from our goal. I took the initiative to go through past materials and locate former corporate and private sponsors who had not donated in the past 2-4 years (A). For a week, I called these contacts and researched new contacts and disconnected phone numbers (A). After putting in numerous hours, my efforts raised another \$9,000 towards our goal (R). During the charity event, the Executive Director presented me with an Employee Excellence award to recognize my efforts and initiative (R)."*

**\*A list of BBI questions is at the end of this tip sheet\***

#### **Questions for the Interviewer:**

You will have the opportunity to ask the interviewer questions. Take this time to demonstrate your interest and research. Formulate at least three questions ahead of time. It is acceptable to have these questions written down and refer to them when the opportunity arises. You may take brief notes, which are a good resource to refer to when you write your thank you note.

**\*A list of questions to ask the interviewer is at the end of this tip sheet\***

#### **POST INTERVIEW:**

- ☑ Collect business card(s) from anyone who interviewed you.
- ☑ Determine what you did well and what you would like to improve.
- ☑ Critique the interviewer and organization to determine if this is a good match for you.
- ☑ Prepare for a second interview. Do more research if necessary. Prepare to answer questions you struggled with or did not know the answer to in the first interview.

#### **FOLLOW-UP:**

- ☑ Send a thank you note to the person who interviewed you. If several interviewers were in the same session, you may decide to send a note to the hiring manager or generate letters to each individual.
- ☑ The thank you note is generally short. The main purpose is to thank the interviewers, reaffirm your interest in that position and the employer and highlight points from the interview that further interested and energized you. This is an opportunity to reiterate why you want the position and why you are qualified. Use your notes to recall key points he/she said during the interview.
- ☑ When time permits, it is best to mail or hand deliver a typed or handwritten thank you note. If this is not possible, you may send an email.
- ☑ Be prompt in sending the thank you note.
- ☑ Follow up the interview with a telephone call if you have not heard from them within the stated time mentioned in the interview.

#### RESOURCES:

- ☐ Call the Career Center at 303-871-2150 to schedule a mock interview appointment.
- ☐ Go to the Career Center web site at [www.du.edu/career](http://www.du.edu/career) and click on Career Links. Scroll down to "Links by Subject" and look for "Interviewing" for links on the Internet.
- ☐

#### BEHAVIOR BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about a time when you were able to solve a problem that others could not.
3. Tell me about a time when you managed conflict successfully.
4. Describe a situation in which you were effectively able to tell your boss about a problem or some bad news.
5. What have you done that caused you to stand out amongst your peers?
6. What have you done that saved time, increased efficiency, or improved a process?
7. Tell me about your most (or least) challenging thing you have done.
8. Tell me about a time when you had to overcome major obstacles to meet a challenge.
9. Tell me about a time when you tried to change a situation.
  - What strategy did you use? How did the situation turn out?
10. Tell me about a time when you tried to do something and failed.
11. Tell me about a mistake you made in dealing with people or working on a team.
12. Tell me about the best and worst class you have ever taken.
13. Give an example of a time when you were disappointed or pleased with your ability to lead.
14. Tell me about a time when you were successful in coping with a pressure situation.
15. Tell me a situation where you had to persuade someone to accept your idea or proposal.
16. Describe your most creative work or school-related project.
17. What are a (job title's) most important skills and why?
18. Demonstrate to me that you possess three of those skills.
19. Describe a situation where you demonstrated initiative.
20. Tell me about a time when you could have worked harder than you did.

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#### SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR THE EMPLOYER

1. What are some of the major short and long-range company objectives?
  - Demonstrates that you are interested in what is important to the interviewer.
  - Helps you to formulate your comments to fit their objectives and to see if you fit in.
2. What characteristics of this company are attractive or unique?
  - The answer you receive will give you reasons for or against working for this organization.
3. What outside influences could effect this company's growth?
  - How vulnerable is this firm? What market changes would make them skyrocket or fail?
4. Are there areas where the company excels or has limitations?
  - The answer will give you the information you need to focus your comments—the areas where your skills and abilities will help with the organization's growth.
5. From your perspective, what are the common factors in successful employees?
  - This is a different way to ask what the employer is looking for in an ideal candidate.
6. Can you share with me the areas of the company that need polishing or developing?
  - Every employer is looking for ways to save money or time. With the information you receive, you should be able to explain how your skills will them time and money.
7. What would you add or subtract from the person who held this position previously?
  - If you are following in the footsteps of someone wonderful, wouldn't it be nice to know before starting? You will be judged based upon past saints and sinners. This information helps you to make the job your own.
8. What concerns do you have about my abilities or me?
  - This is the secret weapon question. This question will help you find out if there is something that concerns them. You can address them before they have a chance to make a decision based upon that information.
9. Where do you think I could contribute the most effectively?
  - This is actually an assumptive way to convince the employer to hire you.
10. "May I have the job?"
  - It is harder for some people to ask for what they want than it is for others. If you want something enough, you need to ask for it. Or try, "I am very interested in this position and am anxious to move forward."
11. When you do get to that fourth interview with the senior vice-president, continue to ask questions.
  - It is ok to ask the same questions—you get everyone's perspective.
12. Why is this position open? Is it a new position or did the previous employee leave?
13. Tell me what you like about working in this organization?

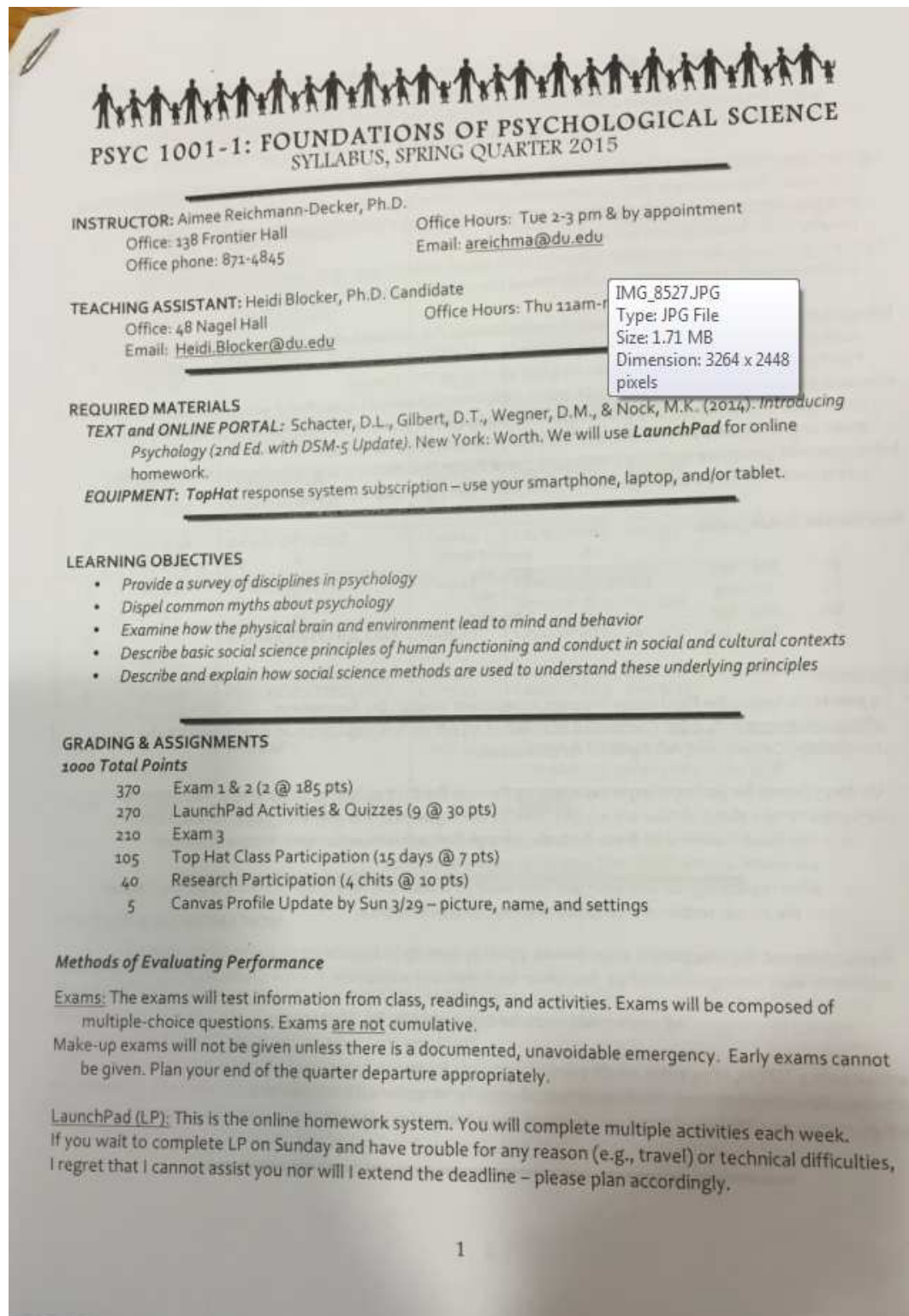
*Sample Questions for the Employer adapted from Colleen Kay Watson, Career Professionals*


DU Career Center  
Driscoll Student Center South  
(under the bookstore)

Twitter.com/CareerServiceDU  
Facebook.com/DUCareerServices

[www.du.edu/career](http://www.du.edu/career)  
[career@du.edu](mailto:career@du.edu)  
303.871.2150

## Appendix F: Student Syllabus



  
**PSYC 1001-1: FOUNDATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE**  
SYLLABUS, SPRING QUARTER 2015

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**INSTRUCTOR:** Aimee Reichmann-Decker, Ph.D.  
Office: 138 Frontier Hall  
Office phone: 871-4845  
Office Hours: Tue 2-3 pm & by appointment  
Email: [areichma@du.edu](mailto:areichma@du.edu)

**TEACHING ASSISTANT:** Heidi Blocker, Ph.D. Candidate  
Office: 48 Nagel Hall  
Email: [Heidi.Blocker@du.edu](mailto:Heidi.Blocker@du.edu)  
Office Hours: Thu 11am-12pm

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Dimension: 3264 x 2448 pixels

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**REQUIRED MATERIALS**  
**TEXT and ONLINE PORTAL:** Schacter, D.L., Gilbert, D.T., Wegner, D.M., & Nock, M.K. (2014). *Introducing Psychology* (2nd Ed. with DSM-5 Update). New York: Worth. We will use **LaunchPad** for online homework.

**EQUIPMENT:** **TopHat** response system subscription – use your smartphone, laptop, and/or tablet.

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**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Provide a survey of disciplines in psychology
- Dispel common myths about psychology
- Examine how the physical brain and environment lead to mind and behavior
- Describe basic social science principles of human functioning and conduct in social and cultural contexts
- Describe and explain how social science methods are used to understand these underlying principles

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**GRADING & ASSIGNMENTS**

**1000 Total Points**

370	Exam 1 & 2 (2 @ 185 pts)
270	LaunchPad Activities & Quizzes (9 @ 30 pts)
210	Exam 3
105	Top Hat Class Participation (15 days @ 7 pts)
40	Research Participation (4 chits @ 10 pts)
5	Canvas Profile Update by Sun 3/29 – picture, name, and settings

**Methods of Evaluating Performance**

**Exams:** The exams will test information from class, readings, and activities. Exams will be composed of multiple-choice questions. Exams are not cumulative.

Make-up exams will not be given unless there is a documented, unavoidable emergency. Early exams cannot be given. Plan your end of the quarter departure appropriately.

**LaunchPad (LP):** This is the online homework system. You will complete multiple activities each week. If you wait to complete LP on Sunday and have trouble for any reason (e.g., travel) or technical difficulties, I regret that I cannot assist you nor will I extend the deadline – please plan accordingly.

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## Appendix G: DU Men's Basketball Schedule

2014-2015 MEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE					
	Overall 12-18	Conf. 6-10	Home 9-7	Away 3-10	Neutral 0-1
Date	Opponent / Event				Arena
11/16/14	vs. Idaho State				Denver, Colo.
11/20/14	at Saint Mary's				Moraga, Calif.
11/23/14	vs. Coppin State				Denver, Colo.
11/26/14	at Belmont				Nashville, Tenn.
11/30/14	vs. New Orleans				Denver, Colo.
12/02/14	at Wyoming (ROOT Sports)				Laramie, Wyo.
12/06/14	at Texas A&M-Corpus Christi				Corpus Christi, Texa
12/10/14	vs. Northern Iowa				Denver, Colo.
12/13/14	at Stanford (Pac-12 Network)				Stanford, Calif.
12/17/14	vs. Texas A&M-Corpus Christi (ROOT Sports)				Denver, Colo.
12/19/14	vs. Colorado State (ROOT Sports)				Denver, Colo.
12/21/14	vs. Bryant University				Denver, Colo.
12/29/14	vs. Saint Joseph's (ROOT Sports)				Denver, Colo.
01/02/15	vs. South Dakota St. (ROOT Sports) *				Denver, Colo.
01/04/15	vs. South Dakota *				Denver, Colo.
01/08/15	at IPFW *				Fort Wayne, Ind.
01/10/15	at IUPUI *				Indianapolis, Ind.
01/14/15	vs. Western Illinois *				Denver, Colo.
01/21/15	vs. Oral Roberts (ROOT Sports) * <span>TU</span>				Denver, Colo.
01/24/15	at Nebraska-Omaha *				Omaha, Neb.
01/29/15	at North Dakota State *				Fargo, N.D.
01/31/15	at South Dakota St. *				Brookings, S.D.
02/07/15	vs. Nebraska-Omaha *				Denver, Colo.
02/12/15	vs. North Dakota State (ROOT Sports) *				Denver, Colo.
02/14/15	vs. IUPUI *				Denver, Colo.
02/19/15	vs. IPFW *				Denver, Colo.
02/21/15	at Western Illinois *				Macomb, Ill.
02/25/15	at South Dakota *				Vermillion, S.D.
02/28/15	at Oral Roberts *				Tulsa, Okla.
Summit League Tournament					